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OR,

FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP OF THE LADDER.

A Story of How a Man Can Rise in America.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS,"
"MAN IN RED," "ONE EYE, THE CAN-
NONEER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOWEST ROUND.

"CLANG, clang, CLANG!! Clangity—clang,
CLANG, CLANG!!!"

The hammers rung on iron plate and rivet-
head, all over the huge shed that held so many
hundreds of grimy workmen, and bore outside,
in letters twelve feet high, the legend:

"EXCELSIOR IRON WORKS."

The din was deafening. Men could only talk
together by looks and signs, words being use-
less, unless one bellowed in the ear of the other,
when it sounded like a far-off whisper.

All over the shed men were hard at work

and the only idle person to be seen was a tall, awkward-looking young fellow, who stood at the door, peering into the dark interior of the great workshop, as if he wished he were among the workers.

Outside, in the dusty glare of the street, all was hot and listless, for it was the middle of July; within, all was dark, save for the red glow of forge and furnace, while smoke-begrimed men worked amid the fires, like gnomes in a cavern of the lower world.

Yet the man outside wished he were inside. He watched with intense interest the huge cranes that carried masses of glowing metal from furnace to anvil. When a dozen men, armed with sledges, flew at one of these masses and attacked it fiercely, he positively panted with excitement.

"Wouldn't I like to be one of them!" he muttered. "Oh, if I could only get a job here!"

He looked pale and thin, though his frame was big-boned and powerful, and his dress had that indescribable awkward slouch that marks the rough countryman, from the lord of a thousand acres to the day laborer.

"Clang! clangity-clang!" went the hammers, louder than ever, when he noticed a man in gray clothes come slowly toward the door, among the engines and workmen, looking right and left under his grizzled eyebrows, not unkindly, but with that indescribable air of pre-occupation and care that marks the master of such a complex organization as a modern machine shop; and the lounge said to himself, half aloud:

"That's the boss, I reckon. All on 'em works like fury, till he's past, and then squints arter him, like they was afraid he'd turn round ag'in. Wonder if I dare ax him for work?"

And he felt his heart jumping violently, this thin, gawky countryman, as the man in gray clothes approached the door, his keen glance scanning everything as he came.

The lounge at the door fell back a pace and looked hungrily at the man in gray, gulping down his embarrassment, feeling his pulses beat like trip hammers, and murmuring all the while:

"I must ax him. I must. It's my only chance. 'Tain't beggin' to ax work."

But his own words did not prevent him from trembling like a leaf; and, when the man in gray came to the door and cast those sharp eyes on him, he flushed scarlet and could not say a word, till the other turned away again and stood with his back to the lounge, looking at the men inside.

Then the lounge saw the man in gray take out his watch, hold it open in his hand a few seconds, and make a silent signal.

Who saw the signal, he knew not; but in the same instant the loud shriek of a steam-whistle pierced the sultry air outside; and, as if by magic, the clang of the hammers ceased with a crash, as the workmen threw them down on the anvils. The whizzing wheels stopped with a harsh scraping sound on their leathern bands, and a low buzz of voices and trample of feet ensued, as the men came pouring out of the shop to their dinner hour, or hunted up their dinner-pails in dark, cool corners of the great shop.

The awkward countryman looked and felt more awkward than before at the sudden exodus; the more so as he met several sneering remarks and glances from the workmen who came out. His color changed rapidly; but all the time he kept his eyes on the man in gray, who still stood in the door of the shop; and, when the stream of men had nearly passed by, the countryman timidly came a little closer to the other, and said:

"Please, mister—"

The man in gray turned his head and gave him one look, eying him from head to foot, as if appraising him, then turned back, without noticing him, and called out to some one in the shop:

"You there, Barker, I want to see you at the office to-night."

Then he favored the lounge with a grimace from under his gray brows, and said:

"Well, what is it, young man?"

The countryman stammered:

"Please, mister—I—I'm looking—for work, and I thought I mou't—mou't git a job—here, sir."

The man in gray eyed him again from crown to toe; then shook his head:

"I'm afraid not. We only want good workmen here. The men won't let us take apprentices."

The countryman's face fell.

"I—I'm sorry, sir—but indeed I ain't no greeny at this. I know I come from the country, but I l'arned my trade, shoein' hosses and fixin' waggins, good as any man in Stoooben caounty. I ain't seen nothen' in this shop, sir, but what I c'd do in a week, ef I was put to it; and ez for forgin', I'll back my work ag'in' any man you've got, sir."

The superintendent looked surprised.

"Where have you worked?" he asked.

"In the arsenal at Springfield, fur a bit. Then at Hartford, fur the Colt's Comp'ny, and then, when I'd l'arned my trade good, dad he reckoned I'd better cum to York, 'cos there

were a chance fur every man here—so he said and—that's all, sir."

The superintendent looked dryly at him.

"You've got quite a tongue, when it gets going, haven't you—ah—what's your name?"

"John Armstrong, sir."

"Humph! and you say you're good at forging, John? Used to trip-hammers?"

"Yes, sir."

John answered in monosyllables now, for the superintendent's comment on his talking had shut him up.

"Very well, I'll try what you're made of at once. I've had men come here before with big stories of what they could do. Go and—no, not yet. How did you get to New York?"

"Walked here, sir."

"Indeed? Had you no money?"

"Not much, sir; I'm only jest outer my time, and dad's bein' sick tuk all my wages, as it's like to, fur some years."

And John sighed slightly, then looked up.

"I wouldn't mind if it kep' me ragged, sir, if there were a chance of *his* gittin' well; but that's the wust on it. Doctor sez he'll never git no better, 'thout we kin send him to Floridy, and if so be I kin git stiddy work here, mebbe I mou't git a chance."

"What's the matter with him?" asked the superintendent, coldly; for he was prone to disbelieve men, from his experience.

"Old wound, sir. Dad fit in the war. I was on'y a little shaver then. All I want now is to git work here, so's I kin show you I ain't no slouch."

"What will you do?"

"Anythin' you sets me at, sir."

"What wages do you expect?"

"Whatever the work's worth, sir. A man in a strange place is like a cat in a strange garret. Got to smell 'round, 'fore he knows where he be."

The superintendent smiled.

"I want this shop swept out at nights. I'll give you fifty cents a night for the job. It will take you from four to six hours. Do you take the offer?"

John looked round; saw that the work was at least as laborious as the other had described it, and answered:

"I'll take it, sir. Glad to git it. Kin I get any day work, too?"

He seemed not at all backward, now he had once begun, and the man in gray gave a short laugh, as he answered:

"It's dinner-time now. Did you ever try riveting a boiler?"

"Yes, sir. Patchin' 'em. Nothin' more."

"Very well."

Then he turned to the shop.

"Barker, come here."

A workman rose from his dinner-can, and came forward; to whom the man in gray said, quietly:

"That helper of yours is a slouch. I see several loose rivets in that boiler. It won't pass the inspector, you know."

Barker looked sullen.

"Be that all, sir?"

"No. I want you to try this young man this afternoon. He says he has worked at patching before. See if he can rivet tight. If he can, send away the other fellow."

Barker nodded, and then eyed John with a sort of sullen disfavor that spoke volumes, as he answered:

"All right, sir. We'll see what he can do. This way, young greeney."

Then he slouched back to his dinner-pail as the superintendent nodded to John and went away, while our hero found himself positively engaged at last, in the house of his dreams, a first-class machine-shop, where they made boilers, engines, locomotives, steam pumps, and all the multifarious contrivances that go toward the making up of our modern civilization.

Poor John! He felt very lonely and hungry that day. He had eaten no breakfast, for his pockets were nearly empty, and he had to save enough for a night's lodging. He sat down on a heap of scrap-iron, and looked wistfully round the shop. A few men were sitting about in groups over their dinner-pails; but most had gone home. He caught more than one glance cast his way, but none were very friendly.

The workman, as a rule, is jealous of a stranger who dresses differently from himself, and John Armstrong had "country" written all over his clothing; while there was something in the shrewd expression of his face, despite his homely speech, that made them see he might prove a man to rise above others in the shop.

As for Barker, he was an Englishman, gruff in speech, narrow in mind, selfish and brutal; and he did not deem it a matter of necessity to speak to his new helper beyond a curt:

"Sit there till I want thee."

For Barker came from Lancashire, where they "thee-thou" people in their speech.

At last John noticed a young man, some distance off in the shop, beckoning; and, when he went there, he found three smart, intelligent-looking fellows, evidently a little above the rest, who greeted him with cordiality. One of them said:

"You look tired and hungry, young fellow. We three always mess together, and live well. We've plenty to spare. Dig in with us. Brothers of labor should eat together."

John needed no second invitation. The tears rushed to his eyes at the unlooked-for kindness, as he said:

"Thankee, boys, I will. Tell the truth, I hain't eat nothin' since last night, and walked fifteen mile to-day."

Then he fell on a thick slice of bread and meat, with a relish that showed he told the truth, and scanned his new comrades, between bites, with satisfaction.

They were all young fellows, like himself, and had a way of speaking unlike men who toiled with their hands alone. Their fare seemed to be quite luxurious for mechanics, and they had a large tin pail full of beer, which one of them offered him presently, saying:

"It won't hurt you. It's only lager!"

But John shook his head.

"Thankee kindly, but I never tech it. I seen lots of fellers begun on that, as ended up in whisky, and I don't need it. Guess there's water round, ain't there?"

"Lots of it," returned one of the men. "Over by the tap you can get all you want, such as it is. It's only Croton. But, I say, what's your name? Mine's Munson, Jack Munson. This is Tom Wheeler, and the other fellow's Jim Stryker."

"And my name's John Armstrong," returned our hero. "I reckon we'll be friends, boys. What mou't you work at, may I ax?"

Munson laughed.

"Oh, we're what they call gentleman hands. We're learning the practical part, to become civil engineers. But what are you to do?"

"I'm to rivet all day, and sweep shop at night," answered John, rather slowly. "It's hard work, but honest; and I'll make two pays, if I kin stand it. I've got a poor sick dad in Painted Post as I want to save all my money to send to Floridy, gents."

The three young men cast furtive glances at each other, and the one called Stryker said, carelessly:

"So you're to sweep out? You can't do it alone, can you?"

John looked round cheerfully.

"Guess so. But I'll hev to ax the boss to let me sleep in the shop to-night."

"Why?" asked Munson.

"Because I won't git through till it's too late to find a boardin'-place. Lucky it's hot weather."

"You can come and board with us, if you like," returned Stryker. "We've got a room with four beds, and they charge us only four dollars a week, if we don't take dinner home. It's only a block."

John flushed up.

"You're mighty kind, sir, mighty kind. But I'm only a plain country boy, and you're gentlemen. Mebbe we mou'tn't agree over well. I ain't one to shove in where I ain't wanted."

Again the young men looked at each other, and Stryker observed:

"As you please. We mean the offer in good faith, and we'll help you clean up, the first night, to shorten the work, if you like. Do you take the offer?"

John could hardly believe it, asking:

"Do you young gents really mean it?"

"Of course," answered Munson, a little impatiently, "or we shouldn't make it. Do you accept?"

"Gents," said John, gravely, "you're all mighty kind to a stranger, mighty kind. I'll take your offer 'bout the board, and say thankee kindly. But as for helpin' in the sweepin', 'twouldn't be fair. I gets pay fur it, and I ain't the man to shirk the work. I'll hev to do that alone."

As he spoke, the whistle shrieked again, and the men began to pour in to work. He went back to his place by Barker, and never noticed that Stryker was looking after him with a decided scowl on his handsome face.

CHAPTER II.

THE LADDER SHAKES.

THAT afternoon John Armstrong worked hard and earned golden opinions, even from the usually sullen and reticent Barker, whose helper he was.

The Englishman put him on at once to clinch rivets, making the other helper, whom the superintendent had stigmatized as a "slouch," bring them from the forge.

For some time Barker scowled over his work as usual, till his new helper had got to the end of a line of rivets, when he inspected them keenly, and a faint grin crossed his harsh features.

Just at that same moment, the man in gray, who always made his appearance when he was not expected, came up to the side of the boiler, glanced over it with his sharp eyes, nodded approval, and motioned Barker to go on with the work. Then he vanished amid the workmen, and they saw him no more till the six o'clock whistle blew, and the clang of hammers ceased like magic.

Then, and not till then, John began to feel a

little wistful and lost, as the workmen washed up and prepared to go home, while he was a stranger to all except the three young men, whom he could now see nowhere.

As he looked round, old Barker, with a sort of gruff cough, asked:

"Got a sleepin'-place, mate?"

"I think so—that is," explained John, "there are three gentlemen hands, as they called themselves, axed me to come to their boardin'-house. But I don't seem to see 'em jest now," he added.

Barker scowled as only a Briton can scowl, as he growled out:

"GEMMEN 'ands! There bean't no gemmen in this bloody country. Doan't 'ee know't, mate? Well, 'ave the way. I were goan to ax thee to coom to ma place, and ma old woman 'ud tak' thee reasonable; but if thee wants to go wi' gemmen, goa, in God's name. Mebbe thou'lt wish thee back wi' Steve Barker."

Without another word he slouched away to the washing-trough, leaving John too much surprised to know what to say. The Englishman seemed to be offended, and Armstrong could not see his friends. Where they had gone, he knew not; and while he was looking round confusedly, he saw the tall form of the superintendent, coming toward him and beckoning him. John instantly went to him, and the old chief took him to the office, a little box of a place at one side of the huge shed, where he shut the door on him, motioned him to sit down, and then said abruptly:

"You're a better workman than I thought, Armstrong. You attend to your business, and do one thing at a time. Now then, about this sweeping. The night watchman has done it hitherto; but he left us yesterday, and the new man won't undertake the sweeping alone, as he doesn't understand the difference between scraps and rubbish. Now, I shall have to hold you responsible for this. Last year we lost several hundred dollars of scrap-iron in the sweepings, and have reason to suspect that there was collusion between the sweeper and some outside party. Consequently, you and the watchman will be alone here, all night. If you like to sleep in the building I'll let you have the sofa, here in the office. It will save you money in board. But—"

Here the old man raised his finger with an air of deep meaning.

"But—I am trusting a stranger on the strength of his honest face. If you fail me, it will be bad for you. If you prove a good man, you shall rise. I promise you that. I came to New York, forty years ago, poorer than you, and now I'm head of this firm. That's all. Now, have you found a boarding-place?"

"I don't exactly know, sir."

And John told him the history of the offer of the "Gentlemen hands."

"What were their names?" asked the other, bending his brows.

"Munson, Wheeler and Stryker," said John, promptly. "D'you know where they live, sir?"

The superintendent asked the counter question of him:

"Do you know who I am?"

"The boss, sir, I s'pose."

"Yes, but—my name, I mean?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not. Well, I am the head of the firm of Stryker Brothers, and that young James Stryker is my nephew, who would be living in my house to day, if he could behave in a decent manner. What did he offer to do? Tell me all."

John began to feel alarmed.

"Nothin' but kindness, sir, nothin' in the world. Offered to take me to board at four dollars, and turn to and help me sweep up the shop."

"And what did you say?"

"Told 'em I were much 'bliged, and I'd board with 'em; but couldn't take help fur doin' the work I'm paid to do alone, sir. That's all."

Old Mr. Stryker nodded.

"Very good. Now you'll want to go to your supper. Take the young man's offer. He lives with the other two, at No. 81 Ashley street—the block next to the north of this. After supper come here. The night watchman is called Sheppard. He will open to you. Then, as I said, you can sleep here after work, or go home, as you please. Good-night. Ah, stop. You'll get two dollars and a quarter a day as riveter, and fifty cents a night for the sweeping. We pay twice a month. Next pay-day is Saturday, so you need not run into debt. That's all. Good-night."

And John Armstrong followed his new employer out of the shop, calculating his weekly wages in his head all the way, and feeling quite cheerful over the prospect ahead of him.

Out in the street he found very few people near the shop, and old Mr. Stryker preceded him to the next corner, where he pointed down the street, to a house where some people were sitting on the front steps, and said:

"That's the place. Good night, Armstrong."

"Good-night, sir."

And they separated, John going toward the boarding-house, saying to himself:

"It's Monday now. That's half a day. I'll hev five days and a half at two twenty-five. That's eleven and a quarter—twelve, thirty-seven. Then the sweepin'—six nights at fifty cents. That's three more. Fifteen dollars, three shillin'. Take out four fur board. That's kinder high. Oughter throw in washin', I reckon. That's 'leven dollar, three shillin'. I kin s'nd dad ten. Oh glory, ain't I happy?"

And just then he came to the foot of the steps where the three "gentlemen hands" were sitting, and looked up, to find them all staring over his head at the opposite side of the street, not one of them saying so much as "Good-evening."

However, John was nowise bashful, so he stopped and said:

"Good-evenin', gents. I've come, if you hain't no objections, to see 'bout that board as you spoke on."

Jim Stryker looked down at him with an air of affected surprise.

"Why, it's Armstrong. Let me see—oh, yes—I'd forgotten. Yes—Mrs. Shafer is inside. Guess she's got a room. You can ask her. She's getting supper ready now, I think."

Then he turned his head away, and the three looked across the street again, as if John Armstrong were a fly on the wall, not worth noticing.

Our hero felt as if some one had treated him to a shower-bath of ice-water. The change from cordiality to coldness had come so suddenly that he could not comprehend it. He turned red, then pale, and had almost turned away, in his disappointment, when a thin woman, with yellow face and gray hair, came through the passage to the open door, and said, in a tired way:

"Supper's ready, gentlemen. Come in."

The three "gentlemen hands" got up and strolled in, without saying "thank you," while Armstrong, a new-born feeling of anger rising in his breast, went up the steps and said to the woman:

"Excuse me, marm. Be you Mrs. Shafer?"

She looked at him scrutinizingly.

"Yes, young man. What is it?"

"I'm workin' at the Iron Works," said John.

"Kin you take me to board, and what'll you charge fur meals? I don't want no room. I sleeps in the shop."

"Would you wish a dinner put up, too?"

"If you please, marm."

"Forty cents a day, young man, and I don't make nothing out of it, hardly. It's a hard time a lone woman has, keepin' a cheap boarding-house now."

John made a mental calculation.

"I'll take it, marm. I kin pay you fur two days ahead, but arter that I'll hev to wait till pay-day, on Saturday. You kin ax Mr. Stryker if I ain't got a steady job; but I'm kinder outer money jest now, owin' to a sick dad as I hev, up at Painted Post."

"Painted Post!" echoed Mrs. Shafer, her face changing. "Good lands, young man, be you from Painted Post? Why, I were raised in Stoooben county. What's your name?"

John told her, and it turned out that she knew his father; so that cordial relations were at once established, and, within five minutes, Armstrong was eating supper down-stairs, with the landlady closely examining him on the life and fortunes of every man, woman and child near the celebrated town of Painted Post.

As for John, his heart warmed toward the poor, overworked boarding-house mistress, as the first townswoman he had found in the wilderness of New York, and he forgot all about the lapse of time till the clock struck seven, and he jumped up, exclaiming:

"Time to git to sweepin', Mrs. Shafer. See you to breakfast, marm. Six, I s'pose. Good-night, marm."

Then he hurried away, intending to go to the shop; but had hardly got out of the house when he saw Stryker on the sidewalk barring the way of a poorly dressed girl who was trying to get past him, and looking pale and frightened.

"Don't be in such a hurry, my dear," the young man was saying. "If you will only take my arm, I'll see you safe home. Indeed, I will."

The girl stopped, panting and glaring at him, as she said, very low:

"Oh, sir, if you are a gentleman—please—"

Stryker stepped before her again as she tried to evade him; and the next moment John Armstrong, who had been looking on as if dazed, suddenly caught the "gentleman hand" by the collar from behind, dug his knee in the other's back and flung him into the gutter, when he stood aside, without so much as looking at the girl's face, and said:

"Pass on, miss. Please excuse this here young man. He's been drinkin'."

His face was as white as a sheet, his eyes were blazing, and the girl gave one frightened glance at him, then sped away like a deer. As for John, he was looking at Munson and Wheeler, who had been smoking on the steps. They had risen and were looking angrily at him, and he thought that a fight was imminent.

He ran back two or three steps, to get all three in front of him, and saw Jim Stryker ris-

ing from the gutter, his evening clothes—for he had doffed his working-dress—covered with dust, his handsome face flushed with passion.

"Let the lout alone, boys," cried Jim, hoarsely. "I'm the man to bring him to his milk. If I can't do it, the quarrel's none of yours. Now then, country, by heavens, I'll see what you are made of."

And, with that, off went coat and vest, and he rushed at John, his eyes glittering with rage.

They were a close match in size, Stryker, if anything, the taller. John backed away and threw off his coat as the other approached, saying earnestly:

"Don't do it! Don't do it! Ye don't know me, Stryker. I don't want to hurt ye."

"Hurt me!" hissed Stryker. "Take care of yourself, you fool. Now, then?"

With that he struck right and left, as fast as he could send the blows, at the face of the countryman, with a force and precision that showed him to be a boxer of no mean order.

But, to the amazement of the lookers-on, the green, awkward countryman kept his head moving faster than the blows, without even lifting his arms to parry, crying: "Keep off, I tell ye. Ye don't know me. Well then, take it, if ye must."

And with that last word, they heard a dull "thud," like the blow of a rammer on hard earth, and Stryker dropped both his hands, stood one moment, trembling all over, and then fell into a limp heap on the sidewalk, where he lay still, apparently senseless.

Then John Armstrong, looking pale and resolute, said to Munson:

"I call ye to witness, I didn't want to hurt him, boys. I wouldn't ha' foun't him fur a good deal. The boss's nevy! But my dad told me, never to let a gal be insulted, if I died fur it. Take him in, boys. He's only dazed like. He got it on the jaw. I'm goin' to the shop, if I'm wanted for this."

Then he strode away, leaving Munson and Wheeler lifting up Stryker, who had a foolish, feeble smile on his face, and was slowly trying to move his limbs, as if he had lost all power over them. He came to the shop; found the private watchman there; was admitted, and set to work at once on his hard job of sweeping and shoveling, assisted by the guardian of the night.

When the job was at last finished the clocks were striking ten, and John observed to the watchman:

"Well, that ain't so bad. We'll git through by nine, to-morrow, I reckon."

The watchman was in the act of answering, when they heard a loud knocking at the door, and a voice called through the grating:

"Sheppard, open this door. You've got a man called Armstrong in there. He's wanted, to answer a charge of assault."

"Why, it's the cops," exclaimed Sheppard, amazedly. "What have you been a-doin'?"

Armstrong made no reply, but went to the door, where the gaslight shone upon the uniforms of several policemen, who had their clubs drawn.

"I'm the man, gents," he said, quietly. "I'm ready to go with ye. Ye needn't hev got so many. You kin handcuff me, if ye like. I ain't that dangerous as you think. Open up, Sheppard."

Then the door opened, and two policemen caught him at once, while two more lifted their clubs menacingly, and a fifth audibly cocked a pistol.

CHAPTER III.

A BROKEN ROUND.

HAD John Armstrong been a whit less cool and clear-headed than he was, he would have been clubbed into insensibility that night, if not killed. He saw, on the faces of the policemen, that grim, savage look which the "finest in the world" have made so familiar to the citizens of New York, when they start on a little clubbing practice.

They had been informed that Armstrong was a "desperate character," and the bold captain of the precinct had sent out a special force, with orders to show no mercy if the arrest were resisted. It never entered their heads but that John would resist, and they were rather disappointed when he held out his hands, saying:

"Iron me ef ye like, gents. I don't want to hurt no one. 'Tain't my style."

"Ain't it?" growled one of his captors. "A pretty muss you've made, anyway. Do you know that young feller's a-goin' to croak? You hit him with a slung-shot."

John made no answer except:

"Take me along, gents, wherever you're a-goin'. I s'pose I'll get a chance to see a jedge in the mornin'."

"Ay, ay," returned the other, leading the way along the dark streets. "You'll see the judge fast enough. Old Brownie, he'll be apt to give you a little nine months on the island, anyhow, and if young Stryker dies it'll go hard with you, my covey."

Again did the cool sense of John help him in the emergency in which he found himself. A more excitable man would have talked back, and so given the bold knights of the club the

opportunity for which they were looking, to extract damaging remarks from the prisoner, or bring on a quarrel in which they might wreak their spite on him.

But John never answered a word. He went quietly along, so submissively that they at last became ashamed of their own needless violence, and so he reached the station-house in perfect tranquillity, where he was reported to the sergeant, who looked a little surprised, but asked after the formal questions:

"Has he been searched for weapons?"

"No, sir," answered John himself. "I hain't got no weepins, and not much in my pockets but a dollar in silver. I jest got in from the country to-day, sir. You kin s'arch me."

The sergeant himself passed his hands rapidly over John, and nodded.

"All right. Give me your money and what's in your pockets. Got a knife?"

"Yes, sir."

John emptied his pockets and was marched off to a cell where he threw himself down on a cot and fell fast asleep in a few minutes, in the innocence of his heart, while the sergeant made an entry in the blotter:

"John Armstrong, native of Painted Post, Steuben county, New York, on charge of assault with intent to kill. No bail."

John slept quietly all night, for the station-houses in July are not apt to be full; and in the morning he got up, civil as before; and, when he had washed in the back yard, was informed that he could send for breakfast if he wanted, and for a lawyer, too, if he pleased, for he might need one.

Poor John shook his head.

"I hain't no money fur nuther, gents, and I'll lose my time anyway to-day. Ef one of you'd tell Mrs. Shafer, 81 Ashley street—I'm boardin' with her—that I want a meal, mebbe she'd send one, fur the sake of old Painted Post; but I ain't sure. It's kinder lonesome here."

And John's face fell. Morning thoughts on an empty stomach are apt to be gloomy.

But, as he could not afford to pay a messenger, Mrs. Shafer, he had to put up with the station-house fare, for which he evinced a remarkably good appetite, and, at nine o'clock, found himself in a certain police court, which shall be nameless, over which Mr. Justice Solon Brown presided in all the dignity for which he is noted.

John stared round, like the countryman he was, at the dark court-room, all the darker to him for the glare in his eyes from the windows behind the judge. He saw a number of people sitting solemnly about, as if in the pews of a church; saw policemen everywhere, and had a general sense of being in the presence of some very mighty personage, when his name was called, and he was taken before the bar.

The justice glared on him through his spectacles, and observed, generally:

"Humph! Well, what's the matter?"

"Guess some one's been a-talkin'—" the workman began, when a stern voice behind him said:

"Shut up. You're not called to speak yet."

John felt humiliated, and stammered:

"Ax yer parding, jedge."

Then the judge observed:

"Humph! Well, what's the charge?"

Then John became aware that Stryker, Munson and Wheeler were all close to him before the bar, and that Stryker had his head bound up in white cloths, and looked very feeble, as he said:

"Please, judge, this ruffian got into a fight with me and my two chums, here, last night at our boarding-house, because we refused to drink with him; and he hauled off and struck me with a slung-shot or brass knuckles or something, I don't know what, so that he knocked me senseless, and then, my friends say, he ran away."

The justice looked coldly at him.

"Humph! And what's your name?"

"James Stryker. My uncle is head of the Excelsior Iron Works," answered the young man, artfully. "I suspect this man had a spite against me because I refused to help him in a job in the shop. He works for my uncle."

The justice turned to the other two.

"Did you see this affair?"

"Yes, sir," said Munson, glibly. "It's all just as Jim says. I think the weapon must have been a slung-shot, because the poor boy's jaw is broken."

"Humph!" observed the judge, "how do you know that?"

"The doctor told us so, sir."

"What doctor?"

"Doctor Rodgers, sir, of Colton street."

"Why isn't he here?"

Munson looked scared.

"I didn't know, sir— We can send—"

"Never mind. Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph!"

Then he turned on John.

"Well, you've heard. What have you got to say?"

John cleared his throat nervously.

"Please, jedge, I'm a stranger here in the city, and I don't see no one here as witnessed the muss—"

"What have you got to say?" interrupted the judge, sharply. "Did you strike this man or not?"

"I hit him one clip, sir; but only when he was a-doin' his best to knock spots out of me. It was a fair stand-up fight, sir. He came for me hot, and I tried to fend him off, 'cause I dassn't hit no more men, sence I nigh killed one on the canal. I told him he didn't know me, but he only let in harder, and at last I let him have one good 'un, that was all, sir."

"Humph! What do you say the fight was about? You've heard his story."

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, it were about a gal, as this young man was insultin' in the street, and my old dad he allers let on that I shouldn't see any gal put upon while I were nigh by."

The magistrate looked at him sharply over his spectacles and then at his three accusers. He was an old hand at the business, and knew there was something crooked in the case before him, but hardly knew what to do in the face of the evidence presented.

He turned to Stryker.

"If you persist you were struck by a slung-shot, I shall have to hold this man for trial. Let me see your face."

Jim slowly and with many groans took off the swathings and showed the side of his face all swelled up and discolored from Armstrong's blow. In the faintest of voices he said:

"Please let me put them on quick, sir. It's torture when the air strikes it."

The judge beckoned a policeman.

"Call Doctor Sawyer," he said, curtly, and the club-swinging vanished into an inner room from whence he brought forth a keen-looking gentleman, to whom the judge said:

"What's the matter with that young man's face, doctor? Says his jaw's broken."

The doctor came up and examined the face with a certain callous keenness that told of years of police practice.

"Yes, it is. Slight fracture, inflammation, bad state of blood. Young man's got to stop drinking, or he'll have a bad face."

Then he looked inquiringly at the judge.

"What did it?"

"Young man says it was a slung-shot. Does it look like it?"

The doctor looked again.

"No. That was a fist. There are the marks of the knuckles. A slung-shot makes a dent in one place."

"Then it was brass knuckles," exclaimed Munson, like a faithful benchman.

The doctor looked at him scornfully.

"No, it wasn't. They cut, and there's no cut there. That was a fist. Is this the man that did it?"

He looked at John, who blushed and said:

"I didn't want, sir, but I had to hit him at last. I don't like to hit any more. I feel kinder sorry I larned it, sir; but I never hits out till I'm cornered."

The judge looked at him with fresh interest now, and the doctor took hold of him and felt his muscles as if he had been an animal.

Then the medico grunted like the judge, and observed, quietly:

"That man's a terror, your honor. I don't want him to hit me. Anything more?"

"No, doctor. That'll do."

The doctor nodded and left the court, when Judge Brown proceeded in a manner that showed some regret:

"I shall have to send you up to the Island, young man. It's a clear case of assault, and you're lucky it's not worse. These gentlemen all swear you struck one of them without provocation, and I've no option but to believe them. If you had a single witness who saw the affair—"

Here there was a slight bustle in the court, and a girl came running down the aisle, panting, to whom a policeman said, roughly:

"Here, none of that. Sit down."

"But please, sir," panted the girl, "I know something of this case. I was by. I—"

The judge, whose watchful eye was everywhere, nodded to the policeman:

"Let her come up."

A small, pale-faced girl, not over seventeen, thin and shabbily dressed, with a face that might not have been ill-looking, but for being so very thin, with large brown eyes that had a frightened look in their depths, came timidly up to the bar. Then she broke out in low, hurried tones:

"Oh, sir, I couldn't get here earlier. I saw all the trouble yesterday. It was on my account that this gentleman—"

"Stop, stop!" said the judge, sharply. "Let's get this thing straight. What's your name?"

"Ella Morton, sir."

"Where do you live, and what's your occupation?"

"I live at 143 Ashley street, sir. I'm a shirt-maker."

"Well, Ella, tell us what you saw?"

"I was coming home, down Ashley street, sir, when this man—pointing to Stryker—came out from the steps he was sitting on, and tried to stop me. He got in front of me,

asked me to take his arm and wouldn't let me alone, though I begged him. Then, when I was frightened half to death, this gentleman came out of the same house, caught the man by the collar and threw him on his back in the street, like a baby. God bless him for it!"

And Ella burst out crying, at which the judge said:

"Tut! tut! keep cool, child. Don't get excited! Go on with your story when you're ready."

Then he blew his nose violently, and looked sternly over the court-room, as if to defy any one who said he was affected.

Ella resumed presently:

"I heard him ask me to excuse the young man, who had been drinking, but I was worse frightened than ever, for I saw they were going to fight—"

"What's that? What! How did you know it?" snapped the judge.

"Oh, sir, he looked so dreadful, as pale as a corpse, with his eyes blazing. And the other man was getting up, and I ran off up the block, but I couldn't help turning once, and I saw that man—pointing again to Stryker—"fighting this gentleman—"turning with a radiant look to John—"as hard as he could. And I heard this gentleman call out, 'I don't want to hurt you,' and then—I don't know how it came, but I heard something like a slap, all the way to where I was standing, and that man dropped and lay still. That's all, sir, and I hope you won't punish the poor gentleman for defending a girl who has no brother to take her part."

The three confederates had turned very pale at the girl's entrance, and said not a word. They had not expected her.

The judge asked her:

"How did you come here? What made you come, I mean?"

"Please, sir, I saw it in the paper, all written falsely; but they had the street and number right, and it said that the prisoner would be brought up before you, sir. That's all. I couldn't get off on account of mother being sick till after the clock struck nine, and I ran all the way, sir."

The judge looked over his spectacles at John and then at Stryker.

"Case dismissed," he said, dryly, "and I'd recommend you, young man, to take the doctor's advice. Next case."

Then John Armstrong found himself out in the street, a free man once more, but only to hear Stryker say, in a voice of concentrated malignity:

"Very well. You beat me that time, but I'll be even yet. You or I will have to leave the works, and you can bet my uncle won't ship me for a stranger."

"You're right there, sir. Reckin I've got to look out for another place."

CHAPTER IV.

FALLING OFF THE LADDER.

It was half-past nine, by the clock on the tower, when John stepped into the street, and he felt rather gloomy at the prospect before him, the more so after the remark just made by Stryker. He looked up and down the street a moment, and was just about to set off for the works, when he felt his sleeve pulled, and Ella Morton was smiling up in his face with a pleading, grateful look, as she half-whispered:

"God bless you for your kindness to me, last night. I couldn't say it before, but I say it now. Won't you come and see my mother some time, that she may thank you too? We've only a poor place, but you'll be always welcome."

John looked down into those brown eyes for the first time in his life. He had not noticed the girl's face before. He turned very red, and said awkwardly:

"Thankee, miss, I'd be glad, ef I thought—if I thought I'd not be in the way."

"In the way!" she echoed. "Oh, you'll never be in the way in our house. And then, you're alone in the city, and, though we're poor, you may want a friend some time, you know! Do come, please. Here, see, I've written down the name and number, so you can't make any mistake. Mother longs to see you."

John turned redder than ever, and stood twisting the paper nervously in his hands, as he said, very low:

"I'll come, miss. I'll come. But please ax yer ma not to thank me. 'Deed, I didn't do it fur thanks. 'Twarn't much, nohow. Any man as is a man would ha' done the same."

"But two who called themselves gentlemen did not do it," she retorted, warmly. "No; you must promise to come, as soon as you can possibly get away. When will you come, so I can tell mother?"

John hesitated.

"I can't rightly tell, miss. Ye see, I'm kinder feared this muss'll get me put out of my job at the shop, and ef that's so, I'll hev to look for work. But I'll try to come on Sunday, if so be I'll git a place. 'Scuse me, miss, but I've got ter go now. Mebbe things ain't as bad as I thought they was at the shop. Good-by, miss."

"Good-by," she said, with another smile.

"Remember, I shall expect you on Sunday, at the very latest."

Then she went away, and John watched her as she turned the corner, with a new feeling stirring at his heart.

"Ain't she got pretty eyes!" he said to himself, in a wondering sort of way. "They used to say Almira Bennet had the biggest eyes in Painted Post; but they warn't nigh as handsome as this gal's. And what a nice name! Ella! Ella Morton! Sounds kinder soft. I wish—"

And here he broke off and strode away toward the shop, which was a long way from the court-house, and which he reached just as the clocks were striking ten, to find the place as full as ever.

John had made up his mind what to do, which was to go to work as if nothing had happened. He took off his coat and went straight to Barker's forge, where he found the gloomy Briton with the usual scowl on his brow, aided by the helper who had been stigmatized as a "slouch," and who now had a scared, stupid look on his face, born of much scolding.

Barker made an imperative sign to the drudge to drop his hammer and resume his task of yesterday, when he and John went to their riveting as if both wanted to make up for lost time.

As for John, he had never worked as hard in his life before; and, when the steam whistle at last blew for noon, Barker exclaimed, with a British oath of satisfaction, throwing down his hammer:

"Weel doan, man! Thou'rt a good 'un, to back a good 'un. We'll mak' a day's work on't yet, if thou'rt game to stick to't."

And he actually laughed aloud.

As for John, now that the noon hour had arrived, he knew that his own time had come with it, for decision. If he were to be discharged, he would be sent for to the office.

Barker noticed him look that way, and broke out:

"Thee needn't be afeared. I heerd on't all; I heerd on't. Didst thee gi'n the gemmen 'and a wallop in, didst thee? Stick to't, lad, stick to't! Steve'll stick by thee, now. Ay, by crikey, a weel."

And John noticed, as the workmen went out to dinner, that more than one friendly glance was cast toward him, while one man called out:

"Good for you, country. Give him canal style, did ye? By gosh, you're a good 'un!"

And then the shop became quiet, and John realized that he was very hungry and had no dinner with him.

Munson and Wheeler were at dinner a little way off, and John had made up his mind to go to Mrs. Shafer's house to get dinner, when he heard his name called, and saw old Mr. Stryker beckoning him to the office.

He turned a shade paler as he went, for he expected his dismissal; but, a little to his surprise Steve Barker rose and followed him to the office, where stood the head of the firm, looking grim.

"Armstrong," he said, "go to your dinner now, and come here as soon as they knock off work in the evening. I've got a word to say to you."

"Very good, sir," returned John, and then he turned away, his heart a little easier than before, and went to his dinner.

He found Mrs. Shafer waiting for him, and as soon as she saw him, she came nervously to him, saying tearfully:

"Oh, Mr. Armstrong, I'm reel sorry. I know you warn't to blame; but what kin a poor widder do? They swears they'll all leave together if you stay, and I've got ter give ye notice. I don't want nothin' for the trifle of wittles you ate, and you can hev yer dinner here, but you'll hev to look out for 'nuther place to-night."

John heard her through, and slowly nodded his head, as he said:

"In coorse, marm, twelve dollars a week ain't to be throw'd away. If ye'll give me my dinner, I'll pay fur it to onst. I don't ax no favors. Reckon New York's a big place, and I kin find somewhere to eat, afore I starve."

Then she brought him out a plentiful dinner, which he ate and paid for, after which he asked, quietly:

"Where's the young man as I hit, marm? He warn't in the shop at work. I'm sorry if I hurt him bad."

She pointed over her shoulder to the next room in a frightened kind of way.

"He's there," she whispered, "listenin' I reckon. Don't say nothin', please."

"Oh, no," said John, "I wouldn't like to quarrel with him, marm; but if you'll be so good's to tell him su'thin' from me, I guess he won't feel so bad."

"And what's that?" she asked, curiously.

"Waal, ye see, 'twarn't fair, my hittin' him, ef he hadn't 'a' made me. I used to be in chums with a fittin' man wunst, when I were servin' my time; and he used ter put on the gloves with me and teach me all he know'd, till he 'lowed I could e'ena'most whip him afore I were twenty-two. And sence that time he put up two jobs on me with the gloves on strangers, and I

knocked 'em both out, and wunst I nearly killed a man on the canal, and I got kinder 'shamed to think I mou't be called a fighter, and give it up, owin' to dad's bein' sick. But I thought mebber if ye'd tell young Mr. Stryker how I were jest, as one might say, in the business, he'd not feel so bad. I know what these gentlemen is when they gets whipped. They feels as if it oughtn't ter be so. Will you tell him?"

"Sart'inly, Mr. Armstrong. Why, I seen it all through the windy, and I must say as how you looked as if you was the most skeert of the two."

"I were, marm; I were. I were thinkin' all the time I'd have to hit out, and lose my place fur whippin' the boss's nevy. I'd e'ena'most made up my mind to take a bastin'—only—"

"Only what?" she asked, for he had stopped.

"Only," he returned, in a low voice, "I thought of that pore gal runnin', and I thought he'd go arter her again, and my old dad would ha' felt 'shamed of me, then. Ye know dad said as how the old sojers of the army never fought so well as arter they'd been whipped again and again, so the enemy got tired of tryin' to keep 'em whipped, and finally they clomb right up on 'em and beat them. Waal, Mrs. Shafer, marm, good-by, marm. Hope you'll 'scuse the liberty I've tuk in talkin' so much, and here's wishin' you long life and health, marm."

Then John walked away back to the shop, feeling lonely and deserted, and said abruptly to Steve Barker:

"Mister, I ain't sure on it, but seems to me you said su'thin' last night 'bout your lady bein' willin' to take me to board, reasonable. Ain't it so?"

Barker looked at him dryly, replying:

"Yes, it be. But ye wanted to goa wi' gemmen 'ands. Thou't ye'd git enough on 'em. Drat 'em!"

"Well," returned John, slowly, "there ain't no hard feelin's 'twixt us, as I knows on, and if so be you're willin' to let your lady git meals fur both on us, I'm willin' to pay fur it, if they don't give me my walkin' ticket to-night."

"They won't give thee no walkin' ticket," retorted Steve, scornfully. "Owd man knows when a's got a good 'and, if thou doan't. 'E woan't let thee go. Dang it, man, I'd go mysen wi' thee, and thou and I get another berth in the Vulcan Works. A good riveter needn't look long for work now."

John felt comforted at this, and Steve then went to bargaining with him for the price of his board, in a way that showed how money was uppermost in the Englishman's mind at the moment.

By the time they had settled it to mutual satisfaction, the bell rung, and work began again, when the two went at their task with such vigor that, when the six-o'clock whistle blew, Steve cried out:

"A good day's work arter all, mate. I tow'd thee we'd do't. Dang it all, thou'rt worth nigh onto two men when thee wakes up good. Coom along now, and a owd woman 'll give thee a real owd-country supper. None o'their danged Yankee 'fixens' as they call 'un. Ods! but a'm weary, I be."

"The boss wants to see me fust," said John, doubtfully. "Ef ye could wait a minit or so—"

"Wait be danged! A'll go wi' thee," replied Barker, heartily. "When Steve Barker takes a shine to a man, 'e doan't do things by 'arves, 'e doan't. A'll go to ta boss wi' thee."

And, just at that moment, they saw the well-known figure of the chief of the iron works at the office door, so John went thither, followed by Steve.

The old man looked at Barker coldly.

"Do you want to see me, Barker?" he asked, so icily that most men would have shrunk back. But Steve never flushed, answering:

"Yes, boss, a do. A want to say—"

"Hush!" interrupted old Stryker, sharply. "If you've anything to say you'll have to wait till I get through with this young man. I sent for him, not for you."

"A know't well," retorted Barker; "but a've got summat to say, and I doan't care a dang if a lose ma place for't. There's other shops i' town, wheer a good riveter can work. If this young man goes, a go, too. That's all, boss. I've said 'un."

And he slouched back to an anvil and sat down on it, looking sulkily at Mr. Stryker, who said not a word in answer, but motioned John to enter the office, where he shut the door and took a seat before he said a word to the workman.

"Sit down, Armstrong," he said at last, pointing to the sofa. "Why were you late at work this morning? It was ten o'clock before you came in."

John turned a shade paler, but answered in a quiet, matter-of-fact way:

"I was in court, sir. They took me up, last night, arter sweepin' out, and 'twere half arter nine afore they let me out."

"What was it for?" asked Mr. Stryker, bending his brows. "Mind, I've heard nothing certain. Only Sheppard told me of your arrest, and I heard from Mr. Munson that my nephew

was struck with a slung-shot. Are you the man that struck him?"

John bowed his head.

"Yes, sir, but not with a shot, or anything but jest my fist, and I didn't want to do that, sir. If you want the hull story, sir, you kin get it from the lady that lives at this here address. She seen it all. I don't want to say nothin' more, sir. I s'pose I'm to be discharged. I 'spected it for whippin' the boss's nevy. I don't blame ye, sir. Blood's thicker than water."

And John handed the old gentleman the address of Ella Morton, which Mr. Stryker calmly copied before he said another word. Then he returned the slip to John and observed:

"You're right, Armstrong. We have to do things we don't want to do, sometimes. I shall have to discharge you."

John's heart sunk within him at the words, though he had expected them. We are all apt to hope against hope.

Mr. Stryker turned to his desk, and wrote rapidly for several minutes, when he turned round again.

"You can do your sweeping to-night and get your pay to-morrow morning for two days' work. I'd like to keep you, but it wouldn't do. I suppose I shall lose Barker, too. I'm s'rry; but, as you say, blood's thicker than water. I must support my nephew, though I suspect he's in the wrong. Come here in the morning, as soon as you see me; but don't go to work with Barker. This is your last night in these works. Good-night."

Then the old man went out and said to Barker, coldly:

"You needn't go to work to-morrow. I don't let my hands dictate to me. You can get your pay at the opening hour. You're discharged."

Then, without waiting for the amazed Barker, who was growing cooler, to say a word, he strode out of the shop, his farewell words ringing in John's ears:

"This is your last night in these works."

CHAPTER V.

CLIMBING AGAIN.

It was with heavy hearts and sober faces that John Armstrong and Steve Barker wended their way from the shop that night, to go to supper. The surly old Briton had not expected to be taken at his word so promptly, and he had not been given the least opportunity for a quarrel. Mr. Stryker had discharged him quietly.

The feeling that comes over a workman suddenly cut off from work, with a family on his hands, is not a pleasant one; and Barker looked gloomy and revengeful, as he slouched homeward. He was a good specimen of the improvident artisan, who lives freely and never has any money saved. He said nothing all the way home, but showed John, with a sort of surly civility, to the hospitalities of his house, which was only a crowded tenement, where Mrs. Barker lived, with four children. But if Steve was surly, Phoebe, his wife, was a neat, cheerful Englishwoman, who welcomed John heartily and made him sit down to a plentiful and wholesome supper, at which Steve was the only silent member.

John watched him closely to see how he behaved to the children, and his eye brightened when he saw that the little ones hung on their father, who did not repulse them, though the gloom never left his brow during the meal.

When it was over, he said to Phoebe:

"Gimme some money, lass. I'm goan out wi' Armstrong."

John saw the woman's face fall, and noticed that the children stopped talking and looked frightened.

Mrs. Barker gave a little nervous laugh, and observed:

"There bean't much left, Steve. Thee knows I had to pay—"

"Gimme the money and howd tha danged tongue, will tha?" growled Steve, so savagely that John started at the sudden transformation.

All in a tremor Phoebe pulled out a little, old-fashioned purse, crying in a terrified tone:

"There, Steve, there. Don't be angry."

He snatched the purse into his pocket.

"I bean't angry, if thou doan't mak' me," he growled. "Coom, lad, let's go out."

And without another word he slouched out of the room, leaving the woman and children white and scared.

John looked at them a moment before he followed; then said in a low voice:

"Don't be skeered, marm. I'll see he don't come to harm."

"But he'll go to drinking. I see it in his eye," sobbed the poor woman. "Oh, don't let him drink. It makes a devil of him. He comes home and beats us all, and— Oh! what has happened?"

"He's bin discharged, marm," said John, sadly. "But never mind," he added in a cheerful tone. "I won't let him spend his money to-night, and we'll get more work in the morning—"

Here the voice of Steve roared from the bottom of the stairs:

"Armstrong! What the deuce ails thee! Be thee coomin' or not, dang thee for a spoil sport."

John nodded to the children and went downstairs, where he found Barker scowling and grumbling.

"What sort o' man be thee, anyway? Do thee want to be tied to a lass, do thee, dang thee? I'm goan to get some beer. An' thou'lt coom, coom. An' thou woan't, go to blazes."

And he was slouching away when John suddenly caught him by the arm, saying, coolly:

"Be ye a reg'lar tarnation fule, or a born greeny, Steve Barker? This here ain't no time to spend money that orter go for them pore little kids up-stairs, when ye don't know wheer the next's a-comin' from. Now you jest look-a-here. I took you fur a man as was a man; but, darn my skin, if you go off and get drunk to-night, you ain't no man at all."

He spoke without a semblance of passion, but looking the other in the eye all the time, and the wild beast in Steve Barker quailed for a moment.

"Who talked o' bein' drunk?" he growled, half-apologetically. "I said beer. It's me own money to spend, bean't it?"

"No," answered John, firmly. "It ain't, and you know it. That pore woman and the kids had it, and you took it from 'em. You jest act like a man, and let beer alone to-night. 'Twon't do ye no good."

But Barker had turned his head to avoid John's eye, and now he suddenly wrenched away his arm.

"Leave me alone, dang thee!" he growled. "I'm no babby to be hordered about. If thee wants beer, coom, if not—"

Without another word he turned and strode away, in as ugly a temper as John had ever seen him. He was a stout, square-built man, with the muscles of a giant, and John said to himself, half in despair:

"How'n thunder be I goin' to stop him? I'll hev to give him one, and that'll be two fights. But I must stop him, somehow."

So saying, he ran after Steve just as the latter halted in front of a low corner groggery, and called out:

"Look-a-here, Steve, Mr. Barker, say! I tell ye what I'll do with ye."

"Well, what?" growled Barker, wheeling on him with the port of an enraged wild beast. "Thee can't stop me, do thee hear, dang thee? I've licked a bishop afore this, as tried me, and got six months fur it, too. Think thee can stop me? I'm goan to drown sorrow, lad. Dang that auld Stryker. 'Thee needn't go to work to-morry,' says he, dang him. I'd like him to know I'm as good a mon as him or thee."

He was evidently trying to work himself into a passion; but John coolly said:

"In course ye be. Who said ye warn't? Tell ye what I'll do with ye, Steve. I'll give ye a wrastle for that purse. If I throw ye, square, ye'll go home with me. Come, I never seen the Englisher 'u'd wrastle a side-holt, yet."

He had struck the right chord; for a grin distorted Steve's surly face. Like many another man, devoid of education and mental resources, he knew of no way to escape ugly thoughts but the bottle. He had flown there for excitement; and here came another form of excitement.

He positively laughed out, as he cried: "Wrastle! Thou! Dang thee, now, I'll do't all night, catch-as-catch-can. Coom!"

And without more ado he ran at John, with the intent of catching him by surprise and throwing him.

But John Armstrong was quicker than his burly opponent, and stepped to one side, avoiding his rush with practiced ease; then, taking the initiative with a peculiar throw he had learned in his young days, he had Steve on his back with a thump that he purposely made so hard as nearly to knock the breath out of the other's body, all without giving the Englishman a chance to grasp him.

Steve Barker lay still a moment, and then scrambled up, growling:

"Dang thee! 'twere a foul trick. I'll break thy noddle for thee."

In another instant he was hailing a shower of blows on Armstrong, who backed away, evading him, for a few steps, and at last sent in a "hot one" right on the mouth of Mr. Barker, who went down slowly, with a dazed, silly smile on his face, and sat staring up at his antagonist as if he did not know what was the matter.

Then John put out his hand and said, in a quiet, matter-of-fact way:

"There, I've downed ye twice. Now come home with me, and get yer face washed. No hard feelin's, I hope?"

Steve got slowly up. The sullenness had gone from his face, though he was bleeding profusely from nose and mouth, but his voice was quite good-humored as he said:

"Thou'rt a good 'un, dang thee! By crikey, thou'rt a better mon than Steve Barker, and a know when a've got enough. A'll coom whoam wi' thee. Odds, but that smack made me see stars!"

He seemed to be perfectly reconciled at going without his liquor. The sudden stunning blow

had given just the needed shock to his nervous system, and disposed him to seek quiet. John took him to the next hydrant, where he washed the blood off his face and discovered a nose and lip puffed into very unsightly proportions, but it was with a perfectly sober, good-humored face that he went up to his room again and tossed his wife the purse, saying:

"There, lass, there. I've thought better on't. John and me will go to work at Vulcan Works to-morry, please the pigs. Wheer's ma pipe? Smoke, John, wiltha?"

"No," answered Armstrong. "I've got to sweep up the shop yet, Steve, and the watchman will be waitin'. Good-night to ye."

And he went away to his task, feeling within himself a sense of satisfaction that broke out in words, as he said:

"Ain't it different, fi'tin' a man as is a man, and a mean man? Steve's a good feller, if he is a Britisher. Darn my skin ef I thought they had sich stuff in 'em. Not a particle of malice, and a good father when he's sober. Guess I kin get him to take the pledge afore I've done."

Then he set to work at the shop with Sheppard, and it was only eight o'clock when they got through sweeping.

John laid down his shovel and looked round the vast shop with a sigh.

"Ain't it a pity?" he said to Sheppard. "Here we've got the work down to a fine point, and I've got to leave. I kinder hate to do it. Got to like the old place, though I've only be'n here two days. But 'tain't no use cryin' over spilt milk. Lucky I kin sleep in the office, if 'tis the last night. Tell ye what, Sheppard, Boss Stryker's a man all over, he is."

And, as Sheppard offered rude consolation, he stopped him with:

"Never mind. No use talkin'. Had to be done. Knew it when I hit the boy. Reckin I won't have to fight no more. Hope so, anyway. Good-night."

And the simple-minded fellow was asleep before five minutes had passed, while Sheppard began his patrol of the shop.

It was early morning when John woke up and went round to Steve Barker's tenement, where he found Mrs. Phoebe, radiant as the day, at work getting breakfast, while Steve still slept.

She greeted him with a smile and whispered, pointing to Steve:

"Never was a better man when he's sober, Mr. Armstrong. The chillen was frouted to death at first, but he put 'em to bed hisself, and if I say it as shouldn't say it, never was a better husband than I've got."

Then they had breakfast, and John and Steve went back to the works as the seven-o'clock whistle blew, to find Mr. Stryker walking about as usual among the men, his keen eye everywhere; saying little, but with a word in time for every one.

As soon as he saw them he went to the office and they followed him there, where they found him, with the pay-roll open before him.

He nodded to them and said to Steve:

"You've two full days. Here's the money. Sign the roll and take it."

Steve turned a little red and took up the pen awkwardly, asking:

"Wheer be I to sign, sir?"

Mr. Stryker showed him, and Steve looked still more awkward.

"Don't see the name, sir. A don't write. The clerk allers writ it."

Mr. Stryker gave him a sharp glance and then wrote his name, when the English workman affixed his mark.

John then came forward, when the old chief asked dryly:

"Can you write?"

"Reckon so, sir. Not to say like a book-keeper, but 'nuff to sign."

And he wrote his name in a style which caused old Stryker to lift his eyebrows and observe:

"Where did you learn to write?"

"At Painted Post, sir," returned John, with some pride. "We had a fust-rate writin'-teacher in districk school. Thank ye, sir. That's right."

And he pocketed his money with a slight sigh, when Mr. Stryker said in an indifferent sort of way:

"Ah, by the by, where do you think of going now, Armstrong?"

"I don't know, sir," returned John, frankly. "Steve, here, and me, we 'lowed we'd try the Vulcan Works. I don't rightly know wheer they be, sir, but Steve knows, I reckon."

Mr. Stryker nodded and drummed on the table in an absent sort of way for several seconds, till he said:

"I'm sorry I've got to discharge you. I never said as much to a hand before, but I mean it. I'd like to take you back, but it can't be done. You know that, Armstrong. Hush, don't speak. Well, you'll need a line to the manager of the works. I may as well tell you I went to see Mrs. Morton last night. I found out the whole story from her, and I want to say to you, Armstrong, that I think you acted right, all through."

I honor and respect you. I hope you'll shake hands at parting and take this note from me to Mr. Handy, the manager of the Vulcan Company. It will get you work. Good-by."

He held out his hand to John, who flushed up to the temples and could hardly speak as he took the letter. But he managed to say:

"Thank ye kindly, sir. Good-by."

Then they were out of the office, Steve Barker looking unusually quiet and thoughtful as they passed through the shop among the workmen, who stared at them in surprise; and in a little while more they were in the street, wending their way to the Vulcan Iron Works, about six blocks off, John with the letter fast in his hand addressed to:

"MR. ABEL HANDY,
"Manager Vulcan Iron Works."

As they neared the works, Steve said in a low tone:

"Boss Stryker's what I call a reel gemman, arter all."

"And I guess there ain't no better," his companion replied. "But here's the works. I feel we're goin' to get a good job here."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND ROUND.

MR. ABEL HANDY proved to be a sharp, energetic man, with much more talk and show about him than the plain old chief of the Excelsior Works. He was the superintendent for a corporation, instead of an owner in person, which made a difference in his manners. He had to please the Directors and stockholders, while bullying his inferiors; but he took a great pride in the works, which were far more showy than those of the Excelsior firm.

He glanced carelessly over Mr. Stryker's note at first, but read it a second time with more care, and at last rung a bell, which called up a boy, to whom he said:

"Take these two men to Birch, foreman of the riveters. Tell him to put them on at first-class work, to oblige Mr. Stryker of the Excelsior, and report to me in the evening."

Then he nodded very slightly to the men, whom he had not addressed in any way, and turned to his desk again, as if too busy to do anything but write, while Armstrong and Barker followed the boy through a shop even larger than the Excelsior, very neatly arranged, though there did not appear to be so much work doing. More than one machine was idle, and the workmen were taking their time over their jobs in a way that had never been seen in the Excelsior shop. John and Steve were taken up to the foreman of the riveters, a tidy man, who had a keen, intelligent face and a comfortable, well-fed air.

He looked at them rather superciliously at first, but put them to work at once on a new boiler, and before long the two friends were clinching rivets in a style that had never been seen before in the Vulcan shop.

When the noon whistle blew, and the newcomers threw down their hammers, Birch came to them, and said, in a sort of bantering way:

"I suppose you fellows are going to wet your names on the pay-roll. You know that's the rule of the shop."

"'Twarn't so in the 'Selsior," dryly replied Steve Barker, looking grim.

"'Selsior be hanged!" retorted Birch. "They don't know how to do things in that dog-hole. We treat men like men here, and those that don't like it are quite welcome to quit. You're English, ain't you? Well, you know the rules."

Steve unwillingly went down into his pockets, growling:

"Well, if a must, a must, a s'pose."

John Armstrong made no difficulty about his share of the tax, for he knew the omnipotence of custom. New-comers had to treat the men in their part of the shop, or take the consequences in ill-will. So the two contributed to the fund for beer, although they could ill afford it.

But when the pail came in, and Birch beckoned to them to join in drinking, Armstrong shook his head smilingly.

"No, thank ye, gents. I ain't thirsty for naught but cold tea; and me and my mate's got enough in this pail. Besides, I never drink beer, though I hain't no objections to your doin' it. Drink hearty, gents."

And at the same moment he whispered to Steve, who was inclined to rise:

"Don't ye do it. 'Tis a darnation mean rule. Let 'em drink alone, and they'll feel kinder 'shamed on it."

Which actually turned out to be the case, when the workmen found that they could not quarrel with the new-comers, but had to drink their beer.

So the dinner hour passed over; and just before it closed Birch said, in a startled kind of way:

"Hallo! here comes Gimlet Eyes. What in thunder's up?"

They looked round and there was Mr. Abel

Handy, walking rapidly through among the idle machines, glancing to right and left with the eye of a hawk, and coming straight toward the place of the riveters.

When he arrived there he cast a sharp look all round him, and spoke to Birch in a stern, quick way:

"How many men have you got on?"

"Nine, sir," replied Birch, in a manner as obsequious as it was possible to make it. "We're rather short-handed, sir."

The manager frowned.

"I should say you were. I promised that boiler for the yacht to-morrow night, and it's hardly begun. What does this mean? You put on two new men this morning. What have they done? Where's their work?"

"Here, sir," responded Birch, nervously, pointing to the new boiler. "They did pretty well for beginners—"

The manager had been eyeing the boiler keenly, and interrupted him without ceremony. "Show me the work of your senior pair. Who are they?"

"Johnson and Creamer, sir."

"Well, where is it?" asked Handy, as sharply as before, and Birch, not being able to collect his thoughts in time to lie, pointed it out:

"There, sir. The other end."

Mr. Handy strode over, looked at the work, and came back with his lips twitching nervously.

"Is that all they did this morning?" he asked. "It's not two-thirds of the other men's work. Show me what the next pair did. Who are they?"

And so he went through the riveters' department, in the keen, merciless way which had earned him the title of "Gimlet Eyes;" the men looking scared, as well they might, for they had all been skulking work for days and days; the manager getting paler at each new discovery, his lips twitching, his eyes gleaming with anger, till at last he burst out into a frightful imprecation, that one would never have expected from one of his smooth and genteel appearance, and shrieked out:

"I'll bounce the whole gang of you, by all that's holy. Every man Jack, but the two new men. It's enough to try the patience of a saint."

And, fairly choking with passion, he shook his fist at Birch, and strode off to the office, just as the whistle blew for work to be resumed.

Armstrong and Barker had never seen anything of the kind before, and went to their work with an uneasy feeling that something bad was going to come of it; but a marvelous change had come over the riveters when Mr. Handy disappeared. They flew at their work with such zeal and energy that John could see they were all capable enough; while Birch put more men on the boiler over which so much trouble had arisen, and, before night came, had made such progress that he observed, in a tone of relief:

"Guess it will blow over, boys. Old Gimlet's sharp; but he's like a firecracker. Big noise, and then it's all over. Phew! That's something like work. She'll be ready in time."

Then, as the men were washing up from their work, Mr. Handy came down again, in his rapid, nervous way and called out:

"Where are those new men?"

The others looked at each other, while a hush came over the party; but as Handy impatiently repeated the question, John and Steve stepped out, and John said, quietly:

"Here we be, sir."

The manager scanned him from head to foot, and asked him:

"Where have you worked before?"

"Springfield Arsenal, Colt's factory, Excelsior Works," returned John, shortly.

"Show me your work and your mate's for the day," continued Handy, in the same quick, imperious way.

John promptly did as requested and Handy went on:

"How many men were on this boiler this afternoon?"

John pursed up his mouth.

"Twarn't my business to look, sir."

Mr. Handy gave an almost imperceptible start and twitched his lips, then wheeled on Birch, asking:

"Well, you then, how many men were on that boiler this afternoon?"

"Six, sir—I thought you were in a hurry so I took them off—"

"Other work—of course," sternly interrupted the manager. "Show me the work of the other four."

This Birch was unable to do without calling the men up, and Mr. Handy, who had become very silent and watchful, at last interrupted the wrangling that threatened, by saying:

"That'll do. I understand. Mr. Birch, report to the office to-morrow morning at seven, before going to work."

Then, with the same abrupt, haughty way he always put on in the shop, on purpose to overawe the men, he said to the rest:

"You've just saved your bacon, this afternoon, my lads. You can work if you've a mind,

and I'll see you do or I'll know the reason why. That's all."

The men turned away with sly glances at each other and sundry winks, while Handy said to John Armstrong, in a very different tone:

"If you and your mate here are not in a hurry to go to supper, I want to see you in the office. You'll not be sorry for it."

Then he nodded and strode away to the quarter of the filers, where they saw him picking up castings and throwing them down, flitting from one object to another like an inquisitive crow, whistling a low tune and glancing all over the shop without seeming to do so.

"E be a sharp 'un," observed Steve, in a whisper. "A'll bet a pound 'e's swang a sledge afore this, tho' 'e looks so smooth. What does 'e want wi' us, I wonder?"

John hesitated and said, very low:

"I'm kinder 'feard he wants one of us two to boss the riveters, Steve. They're mighty slack round here, and this here lookin' round by fits and starts ain't like Mr. Stryker's way of doin' things. They wants good men for foremen here. You'll have to take it, 'cause you're the oldest hand."

Steve shook his head with a sigh.

"No, lad, no, 'tis thy place, I dunno how to read. A couldn't take it. A couldn't. A'll rivet ag'in' any mon, but as for foreman, 'tis a step above me. There. Boss is gone to the office. Go thou and take thy luck."

They went slowly to the office, and found Handy sitting back in his turning-chair, with an air of relief on his face, smoking a cigar. He nodded and smiled to them with a genial, if rather patronizing air, that contrasted with his previous behavior, producing in John's mind a sense of insincerity, as of one acting a part, though Steve was wonderfully impressed by it.

"Come in, come in, boys," he said. "Well, how do you like the Vulcan, now you've had a day in it?"

"Wery much, sir," returned Steve, with a respectful grin. "Couldn't ax a better place than we 'ave, if the wages be all right. Been gettin' two seventy-five, sir, apiece, me and ma mate."

"No, you haven't," interrupted Handy, sharply. "I know riveters' wages, my man. Don't try to fool me. Can you read and write?"

"Noa, sir," answered Steve, abashed.

"Can you?" asked Handy, turning to John.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, did you ever have charge of a gang before?"

At this moment John happened to look over Handy's head at the window and saw the face of Birch, listening. He hesitated to answer, and finally replied:

"Once, sir. At Hartford."

Handy watched him keenly and smiled slightly as he asked:

"Well, why did you leave?"

John turned crimson, but looked his interrogator straight in the face, saying:

"I were discharged, sir, for nigh killin' a man the second day. I used to have a temper then, sir, though I've striv' hard ag'in' it sence that time. He were a-shirkin' work, and giv' me some back talk, and I hit him, sir. I hadn't orter done it, and the boss seen me drop him. I said I'd never hit a man ag'in' arter that, unless he made me do it, to keep from bein' licked. But I don't covet no foreman's job, sir. It will be a trial. I'll be thinkin', all the time, of poor Dave Jenkins, as I laid out. He didn't work for three weeks, sir, and it took all my savin's to keep his fam'ly goin'."

John noticed, all the while he was talking, that Birch's face at the window grew more and more malignant, but the man seemed to be waiting with intense anxiety for the reply of the superintendent.

Handy had listened to this story with a singular expression of watchfulness, as if mentally appraising John, and when the man finished, he answered:

"Then you're just the man I want. I make you foreman of the riveters. Begin to-morrow morning. Come to the office and get your day's work mapped out. The old men will try to shirk all they can, and need a tight hand over them. You can cow them down. That's what they want. You'll get thirty dollars a week for the job, and if you do well in it, I'll have promotion for you. I like your face very well. Good-evening now. I've a few letters to write."

And he wheeled round in his chair, turning his back with a discourtesy of which he had often studied the effect, and plunged into writing with an intentness that awed Steve Barker to silence, while Birch's face vanished.

Not till they were outside did the Englishman whisper to John:

"E's a sharp 'un, 'e be. By crikey, 'e's gotten eyes in back of 'un's 'ead. But, say, lad, dang it all, I'm glad o' thy luck, and by crikey, thou'rt well deservin' o't. Owd woman 'll be main well pleased wi't."

Which proved to be the case when they got home, where John was accommodated with a bed—no great luxury in a tenement-house, but better than the street—and where they all had a great rejoicing that night.

Next morning, on going to the works, there was Mr. Handy, who said to the riveters in his imperious way:

"Boys, this is your new foreman, Mr. Armstrong. I've chosen him, because he's the best workman in your crowd. You'll do as he says, or he'll know the reason why. He laid a man up for two months in his last place, for shirking and back talk, so look out for yourselves. If ever he hits you it'll be all day with you. Have that boiler ready to go by three o'clock, Mr. Armstrong."

Then he wheeled about and went off, leaving the men staring at Armstrong in surprise and fear.

CHAPTER VII.

NOT DOWN YET.

MR. ABEL HANDY proved to be a good judge of human nature, for his short address to the men worked wonders in favor of Armstrong. No reputation wins for itself among workmen so much respect as that of being a quiet man but a dangerous fighter, and the very men who would have bothered our hero the most had they not heard his prowess so highly spoken of, jumped nervously to obey his slightest order after Handy's speech, and worked as they had never done before in the Vulcan Company's shop—as well as they did at the Excelsior Works, in fact.

In the evening Mr. Handy came round to inspect things, and nodded as one well pleased at the riveters' department, from which he straightway went over to the filers, and proceeded to blow up their foreman, sky-high, holding up the example of Armstrong, much to the poor fellow's confusion; for he knew the jealousy that would ensue.

Then, when the mercurial manager had done all he could to set the two departments by the ears, he vanished, with a threat to discharge all the filers if next day were not better, and Armstrong saw that war was declared between him and the other foreman, a big man with a fine black beard and a good opinion of his own powers in every respect.

Hostilities broke out as soon as the manager vanished, by the filer, in loud tones, calling out:

"Darned if I like these suckers. Getting round old Gimlet, and setting a whole shop by the ears. I say they'd better go back where they come from. We don't want no country bosses here."

The riveters looked at John, but he went on with his washing with a calmness that nothing disturbed, and drew on his coat to go home without noticing the other, who took courage at his silence, thinking him afraid, and treated him to a volley of indirect abuse, to which Armstrong gave no word of answer till the filer cried:

"Here, you, foreman sucker—you, riveter foreman, I mean—what's your name, darn ye?"

Armstrong turned round with a smile that was perfectly easy, saying:

"My name? John Armstrong. What's yourn, friend?"

"My name's Fightin' Mike Hennessy," cried the other, "and I can whip you out of your skin, you dirty sucker, undermining better men with the boss—d'ye hear?"

Armstrong colored slightly, while all the workmen within hearing stopped dressing to stare; but it was with perfect good temper that he replied:

"Mebbe you kin, Mr. Hennessy, but I don't see why you should. I ain't on the fight now-adays."

"Maybe you used to be, then," sneered Hennessy, elaborately. "I've heard lots of country greenies come here and talk fight, till I got at 'em."

John Armstrong smiled slightly.

"It's a bad biz, fitin', Mr. Hennessy," was all he replied. "I don't want no fight. Good-evenin'."

And he turned his back and walked away, when Hennessy yelled out:

"That's it. Run, ye coward. Any one can see you're the son of a coward."

Armstrong was near the door as the words reached him, and heard a low hiss from the riveters. He stopped short, wheeled round, and came back to Hennessy, taking off his coat as he came, but halting within ten feet of the other. Then, amid dead silence, he said:

"My father fit in the war, sir. He warn't never called a coward, and he never run in his life."

Hennessy laughed sneeringly.

"Fit in the war, country! Druv' a wagon, you mean. There was lots of skulks and bounty-jumpers as tells how they fought, and lie about it."

John had turned very white now, and his eyes were blazing, as he replied:

"Mr. Hennessy, I don't want no trouble with ye. We're feller-workers in the same shop, and I've told ye I ain't on the fight now. I war, ons't, and sorry I am fur it. My father were shot through the lungs at Gettysburg, and he draws a pension fur it. Kin you say as much fur yourn?"

The question seemed, for some reason, to irritate Hennessy, for he snarled:

"Go to blazes and find out. I'll mash you in the jaw, I will, if you say any more about my father."

John drew back a little, with a start.

"No, no," he said, earnestly, "don't mistake me. I love my poor old dad too much to speak ill of any other man's father. 'Tain't that, Hennessy, 'tain't that—"

"I don't care what the blazes it is," the other interrupted, brutally, taking the countryman's scruple for a sign of yielding. "You're a consarned coward, that's what you are, and you've got to take the name. Wait till I ketch you outside. I'll get square with you for sucking round the boss. I'll tan your hide for ye."

And, so saying, with a triumphant laugh, he flung away, leaving John standing by an anvil alone with his old chum, Steve Barker, while the riveters passed out by him, with a sneer on every face, and one said, audibly:

"Fighting Mike's cowed him, by gosh!"

Armstrong started as if a bee had stung him, and looked around at Steve with a face like ashes, tears in his eyes.

"By heavens!" he cried out, with a roar like a wounded lion. "I can't—I can't stand it! Hev I got to fight again to-night?"

Then came a jeering laugh from the men at the door, and one called back:

"Fight! Oh, blazes! You ain't worth shucks to fight, no more nor yer darned old daddy."

Armstrong knew the voice of the black-bearded Fighting Mike Hennessy, and he picked up his coat from the anvil where it lay, handing it to Barker, and saying:

"You see. He will have it. I kin stand anything but that. Come with me."

Barker nodded with a grin, and the young workman strode out into the crowd, throwing the men right and left like so many kittens, till he came to Hennessy, on whose shoulder he laid the grip of a giant, and flung him back several feet, utterly amazed.

"Now," he said, in a whisper through white lips, glaring at Hennessy, "you'll take back what you said about my father or fight at once."

Hennessy had felt the grip and saw the face before him, and for the first time began to realize that he had a dangerous customer to deal with. He backed away, crying out:

"Fair play! You've got your coat off—I hain't. I didn't say nothing against your father, that I know of."

"You lie!" hissed John, now at last fairly lashed into frenzy. "You cursed him. You called me the son of a coward. D'ye take it back?"

Hennessy began to drop his coat off, and Armstrong fell back a pace to let him do it. When he had done so, one might have seen that "Fighting Mike" was rather pale, and that his lips were trembling.

"Are ye ready?" growled Armstrong, while the men gathered round with anxious faces. "D'ye take it back or no?"

"Come on!" answered Hennessy, who could not retreat now, had he wished.

The words were not out of his lips ere the countryman advanced with a sudden spring like a tiger, and gave him a single right-hand blow under the chin that lifted "Fighting Mike" clear off his feet, and dropped him on the pavement with a thump. In another moment Armstrong was on him as he lay, his eyes glaring, his white teeth shining, as he hissed:

"D'ye take it back?" his knuckles deep in the other's throat.

He had calculated the force of his blow coolly, in all his anger, and knew that Hennessy was not insensible.

In fact, the other gurgled out:

"Yes, yes, enough."

Then Armstrong jumped up in a moment, and waved away the workmen.

"Ye would have it," he said, hoarsely. "I didn't seek it, God knows; but arter this I give ye all notice, any man that says a word ag'in' my old dad I'll lay him out so he'll never do't again. Clear out!"

He was roused at last to the very depths of his simple nature; this strong, self-controlled man, who had endured patiently so much contumely. There was a fierce look in his face, even now, from which the stoutest workmen shrunk back, and he swung through the crowd, followed by Steve Barker, who had a quiet grin on his face, denoting intense satisfaction, and who remarked audibly as he looked at Hennessy, sitting ruefully up:

"E's got his bellyful at last, 'as 'e. Tell ye what, lads, these quiet chaps be main dangerous when ye work 'em oop too much. They'll stond spittin', but ye mustn't try to rub 'un in. It ain't allers safe. Good-night."

Then he slouched down the street after John, whom he found panting and glaring at the walls as he strode on, and who greeted him as he took his coat with:

"Thankye, thankye, Steve, thankye. You're a good friend, a good friend. Say, did I look bad, did I?"

"Bad?" echoed Steve, puzzled. "Thou look'dst like a born fouten man, that's all, lad. Why, what's come over thee? Thou look'st like thou was 'fronted at summat. What is 'un?"

"I am, I am," returned Armstrong, with a sort of nervous shiver. "I'm afeared of myself, Steve, myself. The minister told me once, when I were a boy, that if I didn't conquer my temper, it would end in murder some day. And I fight it so hard. I fought it to-night as long as I could, but it got the best of me at last. Oh, ain't I glad he said he took it back. Why, do you know, Steve—"

Here he stopped, drew a deep breath, and continued, with a face that had a tired sort of look about it, curious to see:

"Do you know I'm afeared ef he hadn't said 'enough' I mou't hev taken his eyes out. Oh, ain't I desprit wicked? I sha'n't have no peace till I git that outer my head. S'pose I'd blinded the poor critter? He didn't know no better. He war only coaxin' a fight. He didn't know my poor old dad, or he couldn't have said what he did. He couldn't. Why, why, Steve, do you know I'm afeared I made a fool of myself. I oughtn'ter noticed him at all. He didn't mean nothin'."

And the anger faded out of his face, to be replaced by a look of simple sorrow, as he went on with Steve, saying:

"I must try to get rid of this temper of mine, Steve, I must. It's mean. It ain't right, 'specially in me, when I know all the fightin' tricks were ever heerd tell on. I'll hev to make it up with pore Hennessy in the morning, I must. He thought I got the boss to give him a layin' out, and he were mad. I'll try and make it up to-morrow."

And thus he rambled on in his simple, great-hearted prattle, till Steve suddenly burst out:

"Odds, mon, be thee a fule or a parson, or what? If a was thou, and 'ad licked three chaps like thou'st done, in three nights, just as easy as kissin' my 'and, the city wouldn't 'old me, 'twouldn't! Swear I can't make thee out, Jack Armstrong. Thou'r't a reg'lar divil one moment, and a suckin' babby next. Coom along and 'ave thy supper like a sensible mon. I'm proud o' thee, dang thee. Dost 'ear?"

And when he took John into supper, he burst out to his wife:

"Hey, missus, what dost think? Danged if that Jack Armstrong ain't licked a man a night every day he's been in this blessed city. 'E's a reg'lar bloody fighter 'e is. Tom Sayers bean't nowhere to him. Give 'un a good supper, lass, and treat him well, for thou'r't boardin' the foreman of the gang, and I'll lay five pound to one 'e'll end in bein' 'ead of the shop afore he's done, for all 'e ain't too much money jest now. They won't trouble 'un again."

And as Steve had predicted so it came about. Next day, not only was there no trouble in the shop, but foreman Hennessy made his appearance, as quiet as a lamb, and hurried up all the filers in their work so that Manager Handy nodded his satisfaction next evening, and set to work to scold the foreman of another department, with the ultimate result of hurrying up the whole shop in every branch of work done there. And so the week passed over quietly without further adventures, Saturday night came, and John received twenty dollars pay for four days' work, and said to himself, with a smile of great thankfulness, going home:

"Fifteen dollars for poor old dad, and mebbe I kin bring him down next week to live here. Oh, glory, how happy I be! How'll I send it safest? Wish I knowed some one in the city as could tell me what to do. Pore Steve ain't no guide in sich matters."

He was meandering along, lost in his own thoughts, when he almost fell over some one, much smaller than himself, and starting back to apologize, saw that it was a girl, who looked up apologetically in his face and said:

"Why, Mr. Armstrong, is it you? And you've never been to see mother all this week."

Poor John, for a moment, blushed to his hair and felt dazed and confused. He had actually forgotten, in his anxieties and work, all about little Ella Morton, over whom he had just stumbled.

He stammered out:

"Yes—that is, miss—I would have come—but—but I've been tired and—but I'm right glad to see ye," he pursued, his countenance gradually warming up, "fur you kin maybe help me a bit, bein' used to city ways like. Kin you tell me where's the post-office, and how I kin send money safest to my poor old dad up in Painted Post, miss? Id take it mighty kind, if ye could tell me."

Ella pursed up her little mouth as if considering, and said doubtfully:

"Well, now, I never had any money to send through the post-office, nor any other way, but I believe there is what they call a money-order system—"

"Yes, yes," said John, eagerly. "I've heerd tell on it, but I never rightly knowed what it were. Do you know, miss?"

"Well, not exactly," she answered, "but I tell you what I can do. You come to see mother, as you promised, to-morrow, in the morning, and she's sure to know. My mother knows everything in the world, I really believe."

Artful Ella!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LADDER OF LOVE.

ARTFUL Ella, and yet so artless! John did not exactly know how it was done, but no more did the girl, for that matter. It just came about naturally, without apparent intention on the part of either. She had said, carelessly:

"I suppose you've forgotten all about the number of our house?"

Then he answered:

"No, indeed, miss; fur I put away the address careful. It be in Ashley street, and that's jest five block away."

To which she responded:

"Yes, and it's quite a little walk with this heavy bundle."

And then John colored crimson, and discovered that the girl had a large bundle lying on the sidewalk, hidden by her skirt, so that he had not seen it before. And he stammered:

"I beg parding, miss; indeed. I didn't see it. You'll let me kerry it fur ye, I hope, if I ain't intrudin'?"

And Ella fairly laughed at his simple way of speaking, and replied:

"Why, of course, I should be very much obliged if you'd see me home, for you know I have to pass by that house where those young men board, and they might—"

John snatched up the bundle like a feather, and said firmly:

"That settles it, miss. I'll do it, and glad of the chance too, you bet."

So it happened that they went down Ashley street together, and passed by No. 81, where Munson, Wheeler and Jim Stryker sat smoking on the steps, and Ella Morton got on the outside, keeping John between her and the house, while the young man glanced menacingly at the three friends as he passed, and all three turned their heads the other way, and pretended not to see him.

It never occurred to John till after the whole thing was over, that it took them a long time to walk from No. 81 to 143, and that during the journey he had done more talking than he had believed it possible he could ever have done to a lady, for he had never had a sister, and looked on women in general, especially those who spoke in the way that Ella Morton did, as a sort of creature between men and angels, to be worshiped and listened to, not familiarly addressed.

Yet, somehow, he found himself talking away to Ella, telling her about Painted Post and his invalid father, till she interrupted him with:

"Here we are, Mr. Armstrong, and I'm really much indebted to you for your kindness. We live in the basement, and mother will be very happy to see you to-morrow morning. I suppose you go to church, don't you?"

"Yes, miss," answered John, getting very bashful again of a sudden. "Dad allers told me how—"

And he stopped short.

"Very well," she said. "Our church opens at a quarter to eleven, and it's just a block away. If mother's well enough, we'll all go together. Good-night."

Then she disappeared down the steps, and John went home in a kind of dream, from which the face of Ella Morton, with its big brown eyes, looked out in a mist of glory, while he could clearly see every window of the house she lived in.

It was a small two-story brick, at the end of a twenty-foot garden, in a retired street which the metropolis had dropped aside long ago, in its hurried march to the Harlem river—one of those streets one stumbles on near the North and East rivers in a day's ramble, to be charmed by their quiet amid the bustle and noise elsewhere.

From the next house, which was at the corner of a still smaller street, one could see the North river, with the gray line of the Palisades beyond, and an old lumber yard and wharf, where a few barges came in every week without noise, making work for four or five men at the most.

"Seems to me," thought John, "I'd kinder like to live round there. It's more like home than them barricks where Steve and his wife puts up. I must ax Miss Morton in the mornin' 'bout rents in these parts."

And when he had had his supper at Steve's, he was so unusually quiet and reticent that Barker remarked it, and rallied him with:

"Ods, mon, what ails thee? Looks like thou'd be'n sparkin', and were thinkin' of a lass, thou dost! Hi, Phoebe, 'tis a fack. See Jock bloosh up. Ods! but that's a good joak. Jock sparkin' a lass afore 'e's a week in the city. 'Oo says country lads bean't a match for city lads any time! Sparkin', by crikey."

Armstrong knew he was very red in the face, but he tried to answer quietly:

"You're a-barkin' up the wrong tree, Mister Barker. I ain't denyin' I seen a lady this evenin'; but she's a reel lady, she is, and I'd take it kind if you'd stop bringin' her in, I would."

Steve stared at him a moment, and then gave a wink of intense meaning to his wife, while he puffed volumes of smoke from his pipe ere replying:

"No offense, lad, no offense! Warn't I crazed myself 'bout Phoebe, there, when I were sparkin' 'Tis the way o' the world, lad. No offense. Wish thee joy, I do, and a good wife."

John turned redder than ever.

"I tell ye, ye're barkin' up the wrong tree, Steve. I ain't sparkin', nor like to be, till my pore ole dad's well again; and no one knows when that'll be, which 'minds me I must write dad a letter to onst'. Wonder where I kin do it?"

Steve looked puzzled.

"Doan't know, lad. Doan't write myself, as thou knowest. Mebbe Phoebe can tell thee. She used to make pot-looks and 'angers in National School, she did, tho' I misdoubt if she writes a tidy 'and, yet."

Phoebe, thus appealed to, replied:

"There's the Christen Mission in Brown Place. Mebbe thee can write there. Heard tell they be main kind to workin'men. It's seven block off."

And John accordingly repaired to the place named, which turned out to be a branch of a Church Mission School, expressly designed to help workmen, with a library and club-room, from which he had the happiness, that very night, to send to his father at Painted Post a draft for fifteen dollars, at the same time making the acquaintance of a man who was to influence his future life very powerfully.

This was Mr. Baldwin, teacher of the artizans' night class, who had once been a workman himself, and who said to John, after he had assisted him in his business, and examined him by the light of a long experience:

"See here, young man. You're too good a man to stay a common laborer. Why don't you come to night school and study mathematics and grammar?"

John stared at him. He was a gray-haired and bearded man, with a shrewd, kindly face that encouraged an answer.

"Well, sir," said John, slowly, "I don't 'zactly know. What's them, sir? I've ben through 'rithmetic up to profit and loss, but I never found much use for't, arter the four rules. Grammar's su'thin' we didn't used to study, up in Painted Post, 'cep teachers."

Mr. Baldwin smiled.

"I should imagine not. Well, I'll tell you why you ought to study grammar. In the first place don't you know some one, we'll say a lady perhaps, whom you respect and admire, who speaks a very different language from what you do, but which you understand perfectly?"

John blushed crimson and said:

"Why, how'd you know that?"

Mr. Baldwin smiled.

"Never mind. Well, would you not like to be able to speak to that lady in a manner that would not perpetually shock her fine sense of what is proper language? It is perfectly easy, you know. You understand me, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"But what?"

"But I don't know nothen' 'bout this here fine way o' talkin' as you calls grammar, sir; and I don't never hope I wouldn't be able to l'arn it, nohow."

Mr. Baldwin could not help laughing.

"Well, well, that's a pretty bad speech of yours to begin with. Do you read the papers, Armstrong?"

"Yes, sir. 'Spesh'ly round 'lection times. Dad allers said a man orter know why he votes a ticket and read both sides to find out."

"Well, suppose you were to read in the paper that the editor didn't know nothing about grammar and didn't never hope he wouldn't be able to learn it, nohow, you would not have much confidence in that paper—eh?"

John stared.

"I don't rightly see your meaning, sir."

"There! Yes, you do. You spoke good enough English there, save that you meant 'exactly' for 'rightly.' I mean this: your education now is enough to answer for the foreman of a gang; but suppose you were promoted to be head of a shop, could you write a proper business letter? Could you make the calculations for an estimate on an engine? Can you draw?"

"Yes, sir, yes," interrupted John, eagerly. "I kin draw. I've draw'd afore now."

Mr. Baldwin looked astonished.

"Well, you're a queer compound, I must say, of knowledge and ignorance, shrewd sense and childlike innocence. I've no more to say. If you want to join the night class, it opens next week, and I shall be happy to help you. That's all. Good-night."

And he turned away, leaving John in a state of puzzlement which lasted him all night, and from which he had not fully emerged next morning when he went, according to promise, to call on Mrs. Morton at 143 Ashley street.

He arrived there about ten o'clock in a bashful mood. His hands and feet had never seemed so large before, nor his clothes so ill made. Not that they were dirty or shabby, for he had spent a good deal of spare cash in smartening up, and looked respectable enough, but he had noticed the difference between the cut of his clothes and those of other men; and, as he passed No. 81, had seen Jim Stryker, in the

carelessly-elegant dress of a well-to-do young man, lounging on the steps, apparently recovered from his drubbing of a week before.

Jim looked so handsome and was attired so faultlessly that John's heart sunk within him as he thought:

"I whipped him, to be sure, but he's above me fur all that."

It was in this humble frame of mind that he timidly rung at the basement door of No. 143, and in another moment stood in a darkened room, hat in hand, nodding and smiling awkwardly, before some one he could hardly see after the glare of the street.

But he heard a very gentle voice which welcomed him kindly, found himself sitting on the edge of a chair, nervously answering questions about his home, and at last made out the figure of a very handsome old lady, with snowy hair and large brown eyes, who was talking to him as if she had known him all his life, while Ella Morton, in a plain, neat dress, was sitting by her mother, smiling at him.

"Did you manage to arrange that little matter about sending on your money?" the old lady was asking him. "Ella told me that you were a stranger here and wanted some information."

"Yes, marm, thankye, marm," stammered John. "A gentleman showed me—a very kind gent, too, marm—one Mr. Baldwin—p'raps you might know him, marm, bein' 'quainted like here."

When he began to speak the old lady's face had become anxious for a moment, but as soon as he mentioned the name she looked relieved, and observed:

"I'm so glad. Yes, I know Mr. Baldwin. He's a very worthy, good man. You could not have a better friend. In fact, he's a friend to every one who needs it. Poor Ella and I owe him a great deal. We have been hard put to it, at times, to live on the poor wages of a seamstress, but, thanks to Mr. Baldwin, Ella begins to teach school here in September, as soon as vacation is over. I'm very glad you've found Mr. Baldwin."

John listened with open ears to every word, and then said, timidly:

"He seemed to be a kinder nice man, marm, but I don't rightly know what he meant—su'thin' he said to me last night. P'raps you mout tell me, marm. 'Scuse me if I make too free, but somehow I feel kinder like I were talkin' to my mother, marm—leastwise—that is—I never had no mother, marm, not to say to remember her, but—"

"I understand you, perfectly," she replied, very softly, as he stammered in his agitation. "Poor boy, poor boy. Yes, yes, think of me as if I were a mother, Mr. Armstrong. I owe you—we both owe you so much. If we can soften your hard lot, let us both do it. What did he say?"

Then John told her, as well as he could, what Mr. Baldwin had said, concluding:

"I put it to you, marm, please tell me plain. I ain't got no feelin's to hurt. Do it make you feel bad to hear me talkin' different to what you do? Do you think I could l'arn to be the same as Mr. Baldwin and you and the eddicated folks?"

The old lady colored slightly, and looked at Ella, who, on her part had her eyes full of tears, and cried out:

"No, no, be as you are. Be good, brave and natural. Who cares for fine speech when the heart's all right? Is it not true, mother? The fine gentleman insulted me, a poor girl, and he took up my cause like a knight of old times. Be just as you are; for yours is a noble, noble heart."

John flushed up and choked, but kept his eyes fixed on the old lady, and said, softly:

"Don't mind her, marm. She's got a heart like a dove. Tell me the thing straight, marm. Don't be afeared."

Then the old lady fixed her motherly eyes on him, and said, gently:

"I don't like to speak on a subject like this, Mr. Armstrong. It is extremely delicate ground. But, if you insist, then I would say to you only this: Take the advice Mr. Baldwin gave you. He was once a common laborer on the docks, and you have far less to learn than he had."

John Armstrong watched her hungrily, and when she had finished he rose up, looking very pale, saying, in a choked voice:

"Thank ye, thank ye. That's mother's talk. I'll do it, marm. Good-by."

And he went out without another word.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER ROUND UP.

Two summers have passed away; twice has the snow come and gone; the mud of March is in the streets, and the flower-girls are beginning to hawk bunches of violets and pansies about, when we come once more on John Armstrong, walking out of the door of the Vulcan Iron Works. Out of the office door, too, not the gate of the general hands.

And what a transformation! It is the same old John in the face, perhaps, yet not altogether so, even there. He is clean shaven, all but a thick blonde mustache, and his face has lost

much of the bronze of former days, while the fashionable cut of his hair gives it a different look. He is dressed plainly, yet in excellent taste, like any business man coming from the office, and his fine erect figure looks as stalwart as ever in the big ulster he wears to fend off the cold raw atmosphere of March.

As he comes out, he pauses at the door a moment to say something, in answer to Mr. Abel Handy; and the last words we catch are:

"Be back early on Monday, Armstrong, for you know how we need you."

"All right, sir," he responds, cheerfully, and then away he strides down the street, humming an air to himself, till he turns the corner and comes almost on top of Mr. James Stryker, who is walking from the Excelsior Works, and who gives him a short business nod, saying:

"Ah, is it you, Armstrong? I see your people got that steamer contract. Wish you joy of it, but don't see how you can make money at those figures."

Armstrong smiled slightly. Stryker is in deep mourning, with a tall crape round his hat, but looks the reverse of mournful.

"I might tell you how to do it," replied the young man, quietly, "but, as you told me once, business is business. However, I'll give you a hint. Had your uncle been alive, we might not have got the contract. Good day. I'm rather in a hurry."

And he bows slightly and strides away. The same Armstrong in figure, the same shrewd sense; the same honest ring of the voice; but, besides all this, something that was not there before: the quiet consciousness of awakened intellect, powers of mind, as well as body; the trained strength of a man who has read widely and wisely; who has devoured knowledge wherever he could get it. A man who knows his own value; who can swing a sledge or clinch a rivet with the best workman in the shop; who can calculate the power of an engine, the speed of a ship before she has left the ways, the strength of a suspension bridge, the battery power for a deep sea telegraph cable; an engineer, in short.

Yes, it is the same man. John Armstrong, mechanic. Proud of his calling, but not vain. No vainer than the simple John of two years before, perhaps, in his heart of hearts, more modest than before, knowing, as he does, how much is left to the wisest man to learn of the hidden forces of nature.

But John Armstrong: mechanic and gentleman, in manner as well as in heart, striding down the street toward the North river, on the most joyful errand his life has yet known.

As he nears the river, where a cold nor-wester is chasing away the clouds and drying up the mud, with a promise of frost, he hears the sharp boom of a brass gun out in the stream, and says to himself, with a smile:

"There she comes! Oh, how glad I feel! And to-morrow—to-morrow is Sunday. I wonder if he has changed much?"

He hurries down to the dock, just as a steamer, of the pattern half-way between ocean and river boat, that denotes a Southern coaster, rounds into the dock, and he sees on the bridge a tall, erect old man, with long white hair and beard, looking anxiously at the dock.

John's eyes are so full of happy tears he can hardly see the figure, and he leans up against a bulkhead, muttering:

"It's dad, it's my old dad, God bless him, all right again, all right. Oh, glory, glory! I could holler right out. Darn my—"

He is talking half-aloud in his excitement, and lapsing into old provincialisms, but pulls up in a moment and flushes slightly; then laughs to himself:

"How the heart will come back to old habits. I must break myself of these vulgarisms. It won't do, John, it won't do. But I wonder if dad will know me?"

The question will soon be settled for the head and stern lines are fast, the gang-plank is lowered, and the white-headed old man comes down on the dock, and looks round him in a puzzled way. He is expecting some one.

John goes quietly forward, his heart beating rapidly, and falters out:

"Father, don't ye know me?"

Then the old man turns, stares at him in a bewildered way, a moment, and at last cries out:

"John!"

No word more, and father and son are in each other's arms as the old man falters brokenly:

"My boy! To think I didn't know ye! Oh, John, John, God bless ye! God bless ye!"

The same countrified accent with which John Armstrong had first asked for work in New York; but softened in the old man by a larger experience of other ways of speaking than his son had once had, a certain proud, self-respecting air, caught from his war training of a generation ago. Yet old John Armstrong is no father to be ashamed of, and his son's face is full of tender joy and exultation as he says, holding the old man away from him to look at him:

"Why, dad, you dear old dad. How ye've changed! I wouldn't have known ye myself, but for the hair and beard. Is the cough all

gone, all gone?" he adds, with a searching, anxious look.

"Every bit," is the cheerful answer.

"Seems to me I forgot I ever had lungs down in Floridy, John. Eh, it's a grand place in winter. I gained fifty pound, boy, in the first winter, and went out a-fishin' with the best of 'em. Why, I feel like I could wrestle a hoss, now, John. Eh, boy, eh? Well, well, this do beat all. My John, assistant superintendent, and livin' in fust-class style. Glory be to God, boy, we orter be thankful for our marcies."

"I am indeed, father," returns John, in a low voice, "but seeing you back safe and well is the best of all. Where's your trunk, or have you more than one? There are plenty of hacks here."

The old man laughs.

"Trunk! Ketch an old sojer with a trunk, John. No, no, I travel light, boy, so I kin break camp at a moment's notice. I've got my old knapsack, and nary thing else. Don't want no hack. The old boys used to march twenty mile a day reg'lar in July, and now I'm well, I don't want no hack."

Then he turns to the ship and calls:

"Hello, Charley! You, sailor man. Heave me that 'ere knapsack on the rail."

And forthwith comes flying through the air a venerable black knapsack, all bulging out with its contents, with the number 198 on the back.

Old Armstrong pats it affectionately.

"That's the reg'lar old thing. How we used to hate it once, and carry nothen but a blanket and a gun to save weight, but I tell ye there ain't no discount on it to hold somethin' more all the time."

And he is about to adjust it, when his son says gravely:

"Not now, father. It's not necessary. We don't use them in this city, and folks will stare at us. We'll ride in the hack, if you don't object, for we've two or three miles to drive to our boarding-house."

"All right, John; you know best," says the old man; "but I've cost ye a heap of money a'ready, and I thought we mout as well save back hire, now I'm well."

His son makes no answer save a pressure of the arm and a fond smile, as he carries the knapsack himself and leads his father to a carriage, when they are driven off rapidly up-town to a boarding-house, very different from the tenement in which John had lodged two years before with old Steve Barker, and where the old man is soon installed in a large room, with all the modern conveniences, at which he stares, in his simple wonder, and says, in a low tone:

"Oh, John, don't it cost a heap to live in this grand place?"

John smiles slightly, as he answers:

"Not so much as you think. Besides, I get a very comfortable salary now, the next to Mr. Handy; and they talk of electing him president."

"What?" exclaims his father, "President of of the States? Why, boy, 'tain't 'lection year."

John laughs.

"No, no. President of the Vulcan Company. He can do better work outside than in, wasting his time over details which I can attend to; and I can tell you, father, that since he's had me to help him keep the men straight, the stock's paid a dividend of eight per cent. quarterly."

The old man looks puzzled and awed.

"I s'pose it's all right," he says, resignedly; "but it will take me time to git used to livin' this way. Didn't it you?"

John colors slightly.

"At first, yes, but when you're used to it, father, it's pleasanter than the way we used to do things at Painted Post. Not that we were dirty, but I can see now that we were careless in little things, rude without meaning it, and did a great deal that would have shocked ladies who have been well brought up."

The old man eyes him keenly, with a jealous feeling at his heart.

"I s'pose then," he says, slowly, "that you want me to change my ways, or you'll be 'shamed of yer old dad?"

John starts violently.

"My God, no, father. What put such an idea into your head? Ashamed of you? No, by heavens, no! When I'm ashamed of you, I deserve to be kicked around the city for a cur."

The old man nods with glistening eyes.

"I thought not, boy. Glad on't, glad on't. D'you know, John, it would e'ena'most kill me to have you 'shamed of me in this fine house. But I don't want to make folks laugh at ye, nuther, boy, even if ye don't let on ye're 'shamed. You jest tell me how folks does here, and I'll try and remember. When ye goin' to supper?"

"When the bell rings, father, and that's the only place people will notice you much, if you make mistakes."

"What, do they eat and drink diff'rnt from what we does in Painted Post?" exclaims the old man, in dismay. "Lordy, boy, I'll never be able to change. Too old a dog to l'arn new tricks."

"No, no," says John, laughing, "they eat and drink just the same, but there are some

things they don't do. It's not hard to learn, father. I can tell you all in less than a minute."

"Well," says the old man, resignedly. "Tell me, boy. What is it fine folks don't do?"

"Well," says John, thoughtfully, "they don't reach across and help themselves, but wait till the servants bring round the dishes."

"That's easy, if there's lots of help. Go on, John."

"They don't cool their tea in a saucer."

"Why not, John? 'Tain't a sin."

"No, but—well, it shows you've no time to wait for it to cool, I suppose."

"Reckon we hain't, John, when we've got ter go to work soon."

"Well, anyway they don't do it. And they never drink so much they have to puff and blow to get back their breath."

"That's easy, John. Anythin' else?"

"Yes, father. They always look out for a napkin, the first thing."

"A what?"

"A napkin, father, a table napkin. It's used to wipe the mouth and catch the crumbs that may fall and spoil one's clothes."

"Never used one," said the old man, dryly.

"No more did I, father, till I learned; and now I wouldn't be without one for the world. It's cleanly, and the great secret of fine living is to keep clean at all times."

The old countryman shrugged his shoulders.

"Waal. Reckin I kin l'arn to use 'em. Do to wipe yer fingers on, arter blowin' yer nose, I s'pose."

John smiled.

"On no account. You must never use it for your nose, and, above all, never blow your nose with your fingers."

"Not outer doors in the street?" asked the old man, innocently. "What's a body to do if he's got a cold, John?"

"Use a pocket handkerchief, father."

"But ef he hain't got none, John, like me?"

John never smiled.

"Here's a clean one, father. You'll find the bureau drawer full of all you need in dress. That's why I had you measured at the tailor's. I was just the same as you, two years ago, and I have to watch myself even now to keep from committing solecisms."

"Committin' what, John?"

"Mistakes I mean, father."

"Waal, John, I'll try. But ain't there nothin' else I mustn't do?"

"Yes, father. You must never put your knife in your mouth, nor pick your teeth with a fork—"

"But I've got a holler tooth; and ef a chunk of meat gets stuck, John, how'n thunder'm I goin' to git it out?"

"You'll have to wait till dinner's over, or use a toothpick very secretly. It's not allowed generally till after dinner's over. You'll see the toothpicks on the table."

The old man looked gloomily at the floor.

"I'll never manage it," he said. "You'll see me doin' all them things, and folks 'll laugh at me, and you'll feel 'shamed of your old dad—you can't help it, boy—I won't blame ye. Reckin I'd better kinder git back to Painted Post, where folks ain't so fine, if they be honest. You're a-goin' up, John, but I'm too old to foler. You jest better leave me behind."

There was a mournful ring in the old man's voice as he spoke, and John came affectionately to his side, saying:

"Father, I've just seen the dearest wish of my heart gratified. I've earned enough money to buy back your health. Now I've got some other wishes to gratify, and I ask you to help me. Think of the old Army of the Potomac, father. How often I've heard you tell of the way the enemy drove you, again and again, all through Virginia, till it seemed as if ill luck was never to leave you. And then you came to Gettysburg at last. Well, did you run? Did you give in to them?"

The old man's eye flashed.

"No, by gosh, boy. We giv' it to 'em good at last. They mout lick us; but, by gosh, the old boys was all there, ready for it, till we whipped 'em at last. Give in? No!"

John ran his arm through his father's, and said with a radiant smile:

"Then don't let the fine folks whip you now, father. Forward, march. There goes the dinner-bell. Steady in the ranks!"

CHAPTER X.

IS HE A GENTLEMAN?

ON that same March evening, in another quarter of the city, not nearly so fashionable, but very quiet and retired—at No. 143 Ashley street, in fact—a young lady was reading a letter in the front parlor, and she has the brown eyes of Ella Morton. But for that, one would hardly have known her; for she was changed, far more than John Armstrong. The thin, hollow face of the girl of seventeen had filled to delicate roundness and peach-like bloom; the brown eyes danced with health and joyful light at what she was reading; and her supple figure, attired in a pretty, but plain silk dress, was perfect in its grace. Ella had prospered with her mother. The poor shirt-making drudge had found her vocation as a teacher, and was earning more

than a competence in day and night-school, while herself and mother had moved from the basement to the next floor and were actually talking of hiring a larger house and taking boarders in May.

"But I don't know if you'll be able to stand it, mother darling," Ella had been just saying, as they discussed the project, when the ring of the postman disturbed their colloquy and set her to reading the letter at which we have just found her.

Her mother, lying back in the rocking-chair, looked rather surprised as the girl came back, and said:

"Who's it from, Ella? Anything about school, my child?"

Ella shook her head, but made no answer and went on reading, the color deepening on her face, a smile that she could not repress wreathing her lips, till, in the most inconsequential way in the world, she suddenly dropped the letter, burst out crying, fell on her knees by her mother and hid her face in the old lady's lap, sobbing:

"Oh, mother, mother, who do you think it is? Who do you think it is? I thought he'd never, never see us again."

The old lady started slightly, and a little spasm of pain crossed her face. It is, to a mother, always a shock to hear her child, to whom she has been everything, mention a man in terms of which she knows full well the meaning.

But she only smoothed down Ella's head; patted it softly, and said:

"There, there, there, child. Don't agitate yourself. You're overworked, with night and day-school together; it's too much. I'm glad it's over. You're nervous. I shall not allow it another season. Well, well. That's better."

For Ella was looking up again in smiles, and holding out the letter, her face very red, as she whispered:

"Read it, mother, read it."

Mrs. Morton quietly took out her glasses and proceeded to peruse the letter, which produced in her no such show of emotion as on her daughter. Still, there was a certain softness in her tones and a little break in her usual steady gravity as she said:

"It is a good letter, Ella, yes, a good letter. He has not lost his good heart, though he has gained in polish. But still the doubt remains—is he a gentleman?"

The girl rose up and flushed angrily as she retorted:

"Could any one not a gentleman have written that letter, mother?"

"How do you know he wrote it, Ella? Mr. Baldwin may have done it for him. He takes a great interest in him."

Ella folded away the letter in the bosom of her dress, and responded sharply:

"I know he wrote it. Baldwin! bah! There's not a grain of poetry in his soul. He's a good, plain, hard man of intellect; that's all. I know John wrote it."

Mrs. Morton lifted her hands.

"John! And you've only seen him twice in all your life! Well, I must say, Ella, I never expected to hear a daughter of mine talk like that. When I was a girl, I waited till your father asked me, before I wasted a thought on any man, much less called him by his Christian name, to my mother."

And the old lady tossed her white head and looked as dignified as a queen; while Ella stood patting her foot angrily on the floor, turning irresolutely to and fro, her face all aquiver with conflicting emotions, till she suddenly broke out sobbing again, and hugged her mother vehemently, with a stifled cry of:

"Forgive me, mother, forgive me! I didn't mean it, but—I can't—I can't—help it."

And the old lady melted instantly at the cry of her child, as her own thoughts flew back to the day, a quarter of a century before, when a like confession had escaped her own heart, if not her lips, all unconscious till then.

"I can't help it!"

Ah! who can help love, that comes and goes like the wind, none know whence or whither? The man and the woman meet who never saw each other before, and in the twinkling of an eye the world is transformed to both, forever. The horizon fades away, earth and sky are lost in a zone of glory encircling one figure alone, and henceforth there is nothing to be seen, felt, heard, but love.

The brown eyes of the mother filled with tears as she heard her daughter's confession, and she smoothed down the shining braids with her old caressing touch, as she whispered:

"There, there, child, never mind. I didn't mean it, darling. Ah, my dear, how blind I've been! How long has this been going on? Why, Ella, I've never heard you even say his name, since he left us, nearly two years ago. I never dreamed of it, child."

Ella looked up wistfully.

"Why not, mother?"

The old lady hesitated slightly.

"You'll not be offended if I speak plainly, dear, will you?"

"Offended, mother! With you?"

"Nay, child, in these matters even mothers must expect to be misconstrued. When the time comes"—here Mrs. Morton heaved a slight sigh—"when the time comes for a mother to lose her only child—"

Ella caught her mother round the neck, crying vehemently:

"Lose me, mother! You shall not, you shall not! Don't talk that way. Who *thinks* of your losing me?"

Mrs. Morton put the clinging arms quietly away and went on:

"When the time comes, it is a loss, my darling; a loss that you will one day understand. We women have to suffer it, sooner or later. We lose all we love, one after the other, till only one thing is left, the hope beyond the grave. But it is well, Ella. I knew it would come some day, child; though not this way. No, I never, truly, I never dreamed of this."

"And why not, mother?" Ella repeated, wistfully. "You said yourself that he was a noble fellow."

Mrs. Morton shivered slightly.

"Yes, yes, I know it, I know it. I cannot say a word against his character, child, as I remember it. He seemed to be a simple, honest, noble-hearted man, an honor to his calling. But then, Ella, you know he was only a common mechanic, with a nasal twang to his speech, a defiance of the commonest rules of grammar that set my teeth on edge all the while he was talking, though I tried to be kind to him in his loneliness, just as I was kind to those poor fellows in the hospital out of your father's regiment. The heart is the same, child, in all conditions. But—"

Here the old lady paused and went on with a slight shudder:

"To marry a man like that is different. Your father was a gentleman, Ella, and I tried to bring you up as a lady. We were as poor as many mechanics, but we used our intellects; we were not clods, with our thoughts centered on bodily wants. When he died so suddenly, it is true we were hard put to it. We tasted the bitterness of extreme poverty. But it was the education we gave you that enabled us to rise to comfort, and to-day we are still ladies, though we earn our own living. We hear no coarse words, see no rude actions, need fear to go into no society. Well, suppose that you marry this John Armstrong, whom you seem to have loved secretly these two years;—what will happen? You admire his fine face and figure, his power to protect you from insult. Doubtless he makes good wages. Mr. Baldwin said something about his being foreman—"

"Assistant superintendent, mother," said Ella, softly.

"Indeed? You seem to be apprised of all his movements, child. Well, what you will. Give him the money of a millionaire he will remain a vulgar rich man, courted by sycophants for his money, perhaps, but sneered at elsewhere by the old name of 'shoddy.' I have nothing to say against his character as a man, Ella; but still the stubborn facts remain. You are a lady of fine feeling; *is he a gentleman?*"

Ella said nothing, but nodded her little head vehemently.

The old lady shrugged her shoulders.

"Perhaps. But he'll never get rid of his vulgarisms; that's certain. He was the most awkward clown I ever saw in all my life. The memory clings to me yet, and I never saw him but once."

Ella tossed her head with a little pout.

"That was two years ago, mother," she said, and with that she went and sat down by the window, looking into the street.

Her mother, in her turn, seemed vexed. It is hardly in nature to expect a girl in love and her mother to think alike on subjects of this sort.

It was in a tone that showed she was struggling with her feelings, that she said:

"You seem to have watched this young man's career pretty closely, Ella."

"I have, mother," was the quiet reply. "I had nothing else to do, you know, after my work was over, and the experiment was in my line as a teacher. I have had boys of nineteen in my night-class, and they worked like Trojans."

"And how have you found it all out?"

"From Mr. Baldwin, of course. It was I who suggested to him, if he ever met Armstrong, to try and get him to go to a night school. I knew it was all he needed to make him a gentleman."

"Indeed? Then I am to understand that you fell in love with this giant for his face and figure from the first?"

Ella flushed deeply.

"I didn't say any such thing, mother."

"Well. When did you begin, then?"

"I don't know, mother."

"You don't know?"

"No, truly. It came without my knowing it. Really, I was not in love with him at first. I felt grateful to him. I did admire him—you know he's a grand fellow, mother—built like a Greek statue—"

"Humph! I see. When it comes to dreaming about Greek statues, Ella—"

"I didn't, mother. Indeed I didn't. But you

must own he is a grand figure of a man, looked at artistically alone."

The old lady pursed up her lips.

"I saw he was a big, strong man, like most blacksmiths. His face might have looked decent, only his hair was cut so vilely, and as for his hands—"

The remembrance caused a grimace.

Ella turned away her head with another pout, observing:

"Well, you're prejudiced. You *won't* see anything in him. I suppose you'd like me to accept the attentions of that Mr. Stryker, now that his uncle's death has left him a millionaire?"

The old lady looked vexed.

"You are unjust. You know I have often told you that he was a young man whom no lady could look on without mistrust. I'd have you treat him with civility, since his humble apology to us for what, doubtless, happened when he was under the influence of liquor. But there is a medium, Ella. You are not reduced to choosing between a debauchee and an honest clown."

Ella made an angry motion.

"John Armstrong's no clown, mother. Wait till you see him before you are so swift to judge. It's not like you to condemn him unheard."

"I've seen him once, child. As a humble visitor, to whom I could be kind, I had no objection; but it seems that he has repudiated that character. He has not been to see us for two years; and now—"

"Now he writes like a man and a gentleman, that there may be no misconception of his motives in coming," said Ella, in a tone of triumph, waving the letter that had caused all the trouble. "Read it over again, mother, and say, if you can, that it was not written by a gentleman."

The old lady made a pettish movement.

"How *can* I read it in the twilight?"

Ella jumped up instantly, radiant with joy, and ran to hug her mother, saying:

"You dear old mother, I knew you'd give in. I'll light the lamp. Oh, I'm so happy."

And she fluttered round her mother, like a bird, making her comfortable in a dozen different ways till the old lady, sitting in state, read out, by lamplight, the following letter:

"MY DEAR MISS MORTON:—"

"After a silence of nearly two years—a silence enforced on my part by the memory of your mother's wise counsel, given with a delicacy I shall never forget—I venture, with a trembling heart, to ask for the privilege of an interview with you both this evening. Two years ago, I came to this city, a poor country boy; and found, in yourself and your dear mother, the only friends I ever knew who showed kindness to me for the man within me, disregarding the outer husk of manner and speech, thrown round me by my deficiencies of early education. In my ignorance of the inexorable laws of society, in those days, I was foolish enough to hope that I might visit at your home on terms of equality, and I might have gone on to this day, trying your patience and courtesy in my stupidly selfish way, had it not been for the frank and fatherly words of our common friend, Mr. Baldwin. Thanks to his assistance, and to your dear mother's courage in telling me the truth, I am no longer the ignorant boor that you remember two years since; but, I hope, a man able to mingle in the society of educated people, without blushing for his own too obvious deficiencies, or causing his friends to blush for him."

"To-day I have compassed a darling object of my life. My dear old father returns from Florida, restored to health, through the comforts my earnings have procured for his shattered frame. May I hope that the day may be made doubly happy to me by signaling the beginning of a permanent friendship between us? I shall do myself the honor of calling at your house this evening with my dear father to ask an answer in person. Your obedient servant,

JOHN ARMSTRONG,
"Mechanic."

CHAPTER XI.

FENCING WITH WORDS.

As the old lady put down the letter, which she had now read a second time, there was a suspicious twinkle in her eyes, and she said, emphatically:

"He has the *feelings* of a gentleman, at any rate. Well, we shall see—"

At that very moment the door-bell rung, and Ella started up, all in a tremor, and cried out:

"Oh, there he is, and I've been crying. I'm not fit to be seen. I—"

And so dashed out of the room in a flurry of haste, and rushed up-stairs, as the little maid-of-all-work came to the door; to whom she whispered:

"Don't let them in till I'm safe out of sight, Kitty; for your life, don't."

Then she disappeared in the darkness of the landing, where she crouched down and peeped through the banisters, as the door opened, letting in a flood of gaslight from the street-lamp at the corner, and disclosing the figures of two gentlemen, one of them the most venerable and patriarchal figure she had ever seen, with a silvery beard falling to his waist.

She heard the other, a tall, handsome young man, ask politely:

"Is Mrs. Morton at home? Mr. Armstrong to see her."

Then she hid her face in her hands, though no one could see her, and trembled all over, as she heard them ushered into the little parlor, where she had left her mother to face the enemy alone.

As for Mrs. Morton, the old lady was perfectly cool, and received the expected guests with a dignity that was tempered with some surprise, as she said:

"Mr. Armstrong? Well, I must admit, I should hardly have known you. I am very glad to see you. And this is your father, of whom we have heard so much. Mr. Armstrong, you have reason to be very proud of your son, sir."

"Thank ye, thank ye, madam," returned the venerable-looking veteran, "John was allers a good boy, and they make good men, if the Lord don't take 'em away 'arly. You'll excuse me, madam, for askin', but a'en't you the lady of Cunnel Morton, of the old Hundred Ninety-eight New York?"

The old lady started and looked at him.

"Yes. Did you serve with my poor Harry?"

"I carried the colors at Gettysburg, madam, and the same bullet what laid me out for the rest of the war, flattened on the cunnel's belt-plate," answered the old man, with a touch of pride. "The cunnel, he allers allowed I stoped it from killing him. Waal, I'm right glad to see you, madam. I told John it must be so."

And the warmth of old associations once awakened, thawed out the old lady's reserve so that she forgot all about it, and it was not till Ella entered the room, ten minutes later, that she, all of a sudden, realized that John, the younger, had not spoken a word yet, though he had bowed with stiff formality on her first reception of the pair.

But Ella's entrance produced an immediate change, and woke up the old lady's watchfulness to intense keenness.

Her brown eyes flashed like diamonds, first on Ella, then on John.

The girl came quietly into the room, with the most indifferent of smiles on her face, and the mother's heart beat high as she thought:

"She won't betray herself to *him*, whatever she may to *me*. She's *my* daughter."

Then her glance flashed over John, and she forgot all about the old man beside her, in her eagerness to watch how the younger man would act. She swept his figure from top to toe, watching for an awkward movement! Her whole being seemed to be absorbed in criticism, of the most jealously searching kind.

And John? How did he stand the test?

He rose up, the moment the door opened, revealing all the grand lines of his figure, his noble, leonine face in profile to the old lady, very pale indeed, with the jaw set, as if choking down something. He waited till the girl's figure was fairly in sight, before he moved, and then bowed profoundly before her, without offering to shake hands, and said quietly:

"Good-evening, Miss Morton. I should hardly have known you, had we met elsewhere. This is my dear father."

And the old soldier had risen, his son's hand on his shoulder, and Mrs. Morton could not help admitting to herself that two grander-looking men she had never seen in all her life. And there was something in the pride and love of the son for the father so touching and noble that the frost in Mrs. Morton's heart melted away and her eyes glistened. She caught and pressed Ella's hand in hers, as the girl sat down beside her, taking refuge under her mother's wing, and Mrs. Morton gave the hand a warning squeeze, but she had no need to fear; for Ella, at that trying moment, comported herself marvelously well. She avoided any reference to the past of John the younger, and dashed into conversation with John the elder, asking about Florida, about old war topics, about everything she could think of; charming the old man to that degree that he forgot all about his society manners, and prattled away as innocently as a child.

And then John the younger took his seat on the other side of Mrs. Morton, without looking further at Ella, and said quietly:

"I hope, from your appearance, that your health has improved, madam. This is a charming little house of yours."

"Thank you. I am not nearly so delicate as I was, Mr. Armstrong. I fancy that work is good for us all in moderation; and I have to look after things at home, now Ella is away so much at school. But you look as well as ever."

John smiled.

"Work is good for us all, as you say. I have no cause to complain, though my time is pretty well occupied. I hope to graduate next week."

"To graduate?" she replied, vaguely. "I don't understand. At what?"

"At the college, madam, as civil and mechanical engineer. You see I had some practical knowledge when I began my course, and down at the works they think the degree a needless distinction; but I have my reason for desiring it. If yourself and daughter have nothing better to do, I hope you will attend our commencement at the Academy of Music, next week. There will be speeches and music, and

we hope to make it a pleasant affair. These tickets admit ladies and gentlemen."

Mrs. Morton took the handsomely embossed cards, and turned them over in a doubtful way.

"I should be very much interested, Mr. Armstrong, but the fact is that we live so quietly, and have so few gentlemen friends that I should like to trespass upon for escort purposes, that—"

She hesitated and looked at him in a searching way. The keen old lady had indulged in a very broad hint to try the young man, and she noticed that his face had paled suddenly, and that his hand trembled slightly, as he absently fingered a book on the table beside him. But he said not a word in answer to the hint, and she bridled up, concluding, coldly:

"I fear we shall have to miss it, unless we can find an escort who will be willing to take care of an old woman like me."

"I could fancy that any gentleman whom you might select, madam, would feel honored by the preference," said John, very quietly. "If I dared to hope that you would accept the escort of my father and myself on that occasion, I should feel that my visit this evening had resulted very happily; but it is a liberty I could hardly take on so short an acquaintance to make the request."

The old lady stared, and thought to herself: "So, so. My gentleman's proud. He wants me to ask him outright."

Aloud she responded:

"I should hardly like to inflict so much trouble on you both. Perhaps I can find an escort—ah, by the by—do you know young Mr. Stryker, head of the Excelsior Iron Works?"

It was a spiteful question; for the old lady knew John's history well; but if she expected to produce a start she was disappointed, for he answered, quietly:

"Yes, madam. He too completes his course, and will be the valedictorian of the evening. He is a fluent and vigorous speaker, and it is very rare to find a man of his wealth who is such a hard worker."

Mrs. Morton looked surprised.

"Indeed! I thought he had graduated long ago?"

"He did, in some branches. But it was one of the conditions of his uncle's will that he should take all the degrees before entering into full control of the business, which is, at present, in the hands of trustees."

The old lady nodded, and observed:

"So that is what has kept him so straight. I thought that he was once a dissipated young man. Do you know?"

She said this carelessly; but, like all her sex, with a great deal of hidden meaning.

John drew himself up a little.

"We are in the same class, madam."

The words were uttered dryly, and the old lady actually colored under them; but recovered herself to say:

"And he is to make the speech of the night. Well, now, I feel interested in that. Ella, my love, did you know Mr. Stryker is to be the valedictorian at the Academy in the Scientific School commencement? Mr. Armstrong has given me tickets, and if we can find an escort, I think I should like to go to hear Mr. Stryker."

Ella had been talking to John's father all this while, but with one ear open to the other side, and she had been secretly exulting in the way in which Armstrong was holding his own under the keen wits of her mother. Mrs. Morton seemed to be trying all she could to put the young man out of countenance and exasperate him, with no effect.

The girl turned her head slightly to say:

"Is he to speak? I didn't think he had it in him, mother. Perhaps Mr. Armstrong would take us, if he has nothing better on his hands for the evening."

"I should deem it an honor," said John, quietly, "if Mrs. Morton wishes for the company of my father and myself."

He spoke very distinctly, looking the old lady in the eye all the time, and she could not help saying:

"Very well. If you will be troubled with us, we shall be pleased to go. I am anxious to hear this young man speak. I suppose that is not in your line, Mr. Armstrong. I mean, you are not a speaker."

"No, madam."

"What a pity! I think every man who aspires to be called a gentleman should be able to make a speech. It is a supreme test of his abilities. This Mr. Stryker must be a man of talent, more than I thought possible."

Then the old lady, satisfied that she had done all in her power to mortify this audacious young mechanic, who dared to come courting the daughter of his father's colonel, turned away to the elder Armstrong and began to question him about Painted Post and other familiar subjects, leaving John alone.

The young man watched her steadily, with a strange expression on his face, and then began to turn over the leaves of a photograph album, where the first face that met his view was James Stryker's in the place of honor.

To say that John Armstrong's heart did not give an unusual throb when he saw this picture,

would be untrue. His thoughts glanced over the past; he thought of the first occasion on which Ella Morton had seen that man; of the insult he had passed on her. And now, to find this very man's face in her album, and to hear her mother singing his praises, stung John to the heart. In his increased knowledge he had not failed to gain increased sensitiveness; and he could not refrain from a frown as he turned over the leaf and came to the next picture—that of Ella herself.

He was roused from a somewhat bitter reverie by the girl's voice next to him:

"Do you think it a good likeness?"

John turned back to the first page, with affected unconsciousness, asking:

"Do you mean this?"

She flushed slightly.

"Oh, no. That is mother's book, you know. I don't see what made her put that in front, except that it is a very handsome picture."

John looked at it steadily.

"Yes, of a very handsome man."

She smiled slightly.

"Handsome is that handsome does. It's a homely old proverb; but I like the old-fashioned ways best, after all. But how is it that you have made friends with that man?"

She spoke in a low tone, so that her mother could not hear her.

Quietly he answered:

"We are not friends, Miss Morton; but in business one cannot afford to indulge private animosities. It is not just to the men who pay us our wages. Mr. Stryker is the head of a rival house, and I am obliged to meet him in business. In the class we are—rivals."

She turned away her head.

"Indeed? Then he has passed you in the race there; for I understand that the delivery of a valedictory is a prize to a collegian. I wish you were going to speak instead. I should like to hear if you could speak well. My mother sets a high value on the art of oratory, you know."

"And do you?" he asked, meaningly.

She hesitated, and then lifted her brown eyes to his frankly.

"Yes. What my mother likes, I like. You have done so much, that I believe you could do anything. Why not learn to speak? I've heard that it is not hard."

He shook his head.

"To me it would be very hard, now. I have tried it and have always broken down. It is so difficult to think, when every one is listening for your every word, and trying to pick flaws. But since you wish it I will do it. And now it grows late. We must take our leave."

"But not for another two years, I hope," whispered the girl, as he rose. And John smiled as he answered:

"I hope not. We shall be here on Friday to escort you to commencement, if nothing unforeseen occurs."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRIKE.

WHEN that Friday evening came, however, it was fated that the party should not meet as agreed. Events had happened which put pleasuring out of every one's head.

The next morning after his visit to the Mortons, when John went away from his boarding-house, he took his father with him. He was not bound for the works that day, but on a trip to Pittsburg, on business connected with the Vulcan Company.

The elder Armstrong was very much pleased with the trip, and wandered over the smoky city, exploring every nook and corner, while his son transacted his business at the foundries. When his time hung heavy on his hands, toward the close of the day, he took the afternoon papers, and John found him at the hotel in the evening staring in a puzzled way at one of them headed "*Fourth Edition, Extra*," which seemed to surprise and perplex him greatly.

"What have you got there, father?" he asked him, pleasantly.

Old Armstrong looked up gravely.

"Did you know the men was a-goin' on a strike, John, all through the trade?"

"Yes, father. I expected it. Where has it had its beginning?"

The old man pointed to his paper.

"In a place called the Excelsior Iron Works. Some young man, called Stryker, is boss in the consarn, it says, and he's axed fur the police to help him."

John nodded gravely.

"I expected it would begin there. The two trustees are close men, and they've been cutting down wages for some time. If the men are temperate and firm, they can beat in the contest. What do they ask, father?"

"Twenty-five cents a day more fur the riveters and filers, and so on fur the rest—some more, some less. It don't seem much to quarrel over, John. If I was the boss, I'd give it to 'em and be done with it. Twenty-five cents a day. Why, 'tain't nothen."

"It mounts up, father, when you have to pay eight hundred men on Saturday night. It means twelve hundred dollars a week, or over sixty thousand dollars a year."

"Sho! John, why so it do! Waal, I never thoughter that. Hope your men won't go on strike, too."

"They will, father. Strikes are sure to spread, and one can't blame the men for it. The only strength of a strike is its spreading to as many people as possible. If every workman in the United States struck to-morrow on a common plan, they would be masters of the whole country. But I wonder—"

Here they were interrupted, as they sat in the hotel lobby, by the clerk tapping the desk and beckoning Armstrong, with a telegram in his hand.

"I thought as much," muttered the young man, and he hastily opened it and read:

"Come back at once. The men are on strike, and I can do nothing with them. Drop contracts, if not signed. HANDY."

"But they *are* signed," muttered John, as he crushed the paper into his pocket; "and what's more, I'm going to carry them out, at any hazard. Drop contracts, indeed! Not one of them, if we have to give the advance to carry them through."

Then he looked at the time-table; found he could get back to New York next morning, and told his father of his plans to go there.

"I should have gone on to Cincinnati and shown you the city, father, but Mr. Handy wants me back at once. I'm afraid that there's going to be trouble. Handy was a workman himself once, but he's very hard and bitter with them. If he sends for the police, there will be a riot."

"But what about, John?"

"Hard to say. It's easy to raise a pretext if both parties are waiting for a fight, and Handy has a hot temper. We must take the express back, father. We've just an hour to get dinner and go."

So that, in the dawn of next morning, John Armstrong found himself back in New York, took his father home, and then insisted on leaving him behind and going to the works alone.

"For you would only be in the way at a time like this, father. The men don't like to see strangers about."

The old soldier acquiesced, saying:

"All right, John. Dooty's dooty, my boy. I'll mount guard over the commissary wagons while you're at the front. Some one's got to do it, and I ain't fit fur active service no more. Take keer of yerself."

Then John strode away on a cold March morning, took a cross-town car, and landed within a block of the Excelsior Works, at which he proposed to take a look before going to the Vulcan shop.

As soon as he turned the corner toward the Excelsior, he saw that matters were in a bad state. The shop was silent; a clear space had been made on the sidewalk in front, which was patrolled by some thirty or forty policemen, but the opposite side of the street, to the middle of the roadway, was occupied by a dense crowd of men, from which went up a low buzz of voices. Those men were the strikers.

John walked quietly down the street on the open sidewalk, taking his time and looking about him. The gate of the works was closed, and a little knot of policemen was in front, the men swinging their clubs by the string and eying the crowd on the other side of the street, as if longing for an opportunity to use their weapons.

As Armstrong approached, a hush fell on the crowd. He knew that the men recognized him, but he walked on till he came to the gate, when one of the policemen called:

"Go out into the middle of the street. No one ain't allowed here."

John looked at him dryly.

"I beg your pardon. I thought this was the proper place to walk."

"None of your lip. Move on," was the only answer of the knight of the club, and every man of the squad instantly clutched his weapon and turned on the young man with a scowl.

A laugh came from the other side of the street and a voice cried out:

"Club him well. He's a Socialist."

But as John merely obeyed the order of the policeman without another word, the laugh became general, and ended in a hoot of derision, amid which the young man heard the same voice call out:

"Armstrong the fighter! Cowed by heavens! Ashamed of his old pals!"

John knew the voice well. It was that of Birch, once foreman of the Vulcan Company riveters, whose place he had taken. The man had since, as he heard, been taken on at the Excelsior Works, and had become the head of some labor club, of which only vague reports were received.

He made no reply, but was going on to his own shop, when a terrible yell burst from the crowd of men behind him, followed by a hubbub that told of some new object of interest; and as he wheeled round, he saw them make a general move down the street, while the policemen gathered into a knot and began to flourish their clubs, as if in fear of an attack.

Looking for the cause of it he saw, down the street, another party of police coming, with the tall figure of Jim Stryker in the middle of the

group, at whom the crowd were yelling all sorts of abuse.

Then came a rush of the guardian police down the sidewalk, scattering the crowd, and a hurried run of the whole party to the gates of the shop, when the stones began to fly, and the police were finally driven into the works, from which they began to fire into the crowd with revolvers.

"I knew it would end that way," said John to himself. "Hope Handy won't take the same course. Time I was off."

And without more ado he hurried away to the Vulcan Company's shop, hearing the shouts of the rioters growing fainter and fainter behind him.

Ten minutes after he was in front of the Vulcan Company's building, where another crowd was gathered, and where the police were also grouped in force.

As he came up the strikers began to shout his name, and came running to meet him with a confusion of cries, of which many were decidedly menacing.

John's heart beat quickly for the first time in months. He saw that the men were much excited, and guessed the cause when he saw the figure of Handy on the office steps, the manager waving his arms wildly to the police, and seeming very angry himself.

He quietly proceeded on his way, however, and as the first men came up, greeted them with a cheerful:

"Good-morning, boys. Glad to see you all. What's the trouble? I've been away, you know. What's up?"

They seemed to be rather taken aback by his coolness; for they halted silently and formed a staring ring, in the midst of which he walked forward, a smile on his lips, till the crowd impeded his further advance, when he asked again:

"Well, what's the matter, men? Why are you not at work to-day? Has the company stopped the machines?"

"No, but we've stopped work," cried a voice in the crowd, "and we ain't goin' on again without the rise. Do you hear that? We ain't afraid of you nor old Gimlet Eyes, nor the cops, nuther. You ain't no better nor the rest of us, if you do put on airs."

John heard a buzz in the crowd as if the speaker's words were approved and he answered, smilingly:

"Who said I was any better than you? I never pretended it myself."

"No, nor you hadn't better," answered the voice, which John knew to belong to a new hand who had not been in the shop more than a month.

The young man looked over the faces of the crowd, and spied Steve Barker and Mike Hennessey, not far off, both looking as if puzzled what to do. By a sort of intuition he knew that they were on his side, though they had joined the strike. Steve, in the course of the last two years, had learned to read and write, by John's solicitation, and had become foreman of the riveters, while Mike Hennessey, since his drubbing of two years before, had become a fast friend of our hero.

John called out to Hennessey:

"Mike, what's all this trouble about? Why do the men want to stop me from going into the works?"

Mike hesitated, and the men looked at him as if expecting an answer. At last he said, slowly:

"They want to know whose side you're on. We want the advance. Are you goin' to help us, or going to try and get scabs? That's why they stop you."

Armstrong heard an approving hum, and asked in return:

"Who has said anything about scabs? You are all skilled workmen. Do you think we could find eight hundred men to take your places at a moment's notice? Who has told you we could?"

"Gimlet says it," roared the new hand. "Old Han y, cuss him! He says it. He's got the police out ag'in' us."

John wheeled and came up to him in the middle of the crowd, which parted on either side. Then he laid his hand on his shoulder and said in a mild way:

"See here, my friend. For a green hand you talk too much. Let the men who know me speak for you. We know our business well enough."

There was a laugh in the crowd, and Barker growled:

"Ay, ay. Armstrong be right, lads. We doan't want no lawyers wif us. Do 'ee 'old thy peace, lad, and let men do the talkin'."

So the agitator shrunk sulkily back, and John continued:

"You want the advance, do you? Well, there's no need to fight over it. It's a matter of business. You've a perfect right to strike, but the company has a right to close the works if they don't pay. You know that as well as I. Now just clear out of my way and let me go into the works. I want to find out what's the matter; to hear both sides of the story."

There was a low buzz, and a voice in the rear cried out:

"How do we know you'll come back?"

John wheeled round.

"Did any one of you ever know me to break my word? I came on here to settle this trouble, and I can't settle it without coming back. I've got to find whether we can afford to pay you all you ask. If we can, all right. If we cannot, the works must close, unless you come down from your terms. But we can't settle things by scowling at each other. Now, for the last time, let me pass. You've no right to stop me, unless you want a fight more than the advance. Out of the way, you."

And, so saying, he shoved a man out of his way, and strode on, the crowd parting in a confused buzz of voices, till he found himself in front of the works and saw Handy on the steps, with a Winchester rifle in his hand, a dozen clerks behind him with revolvers, and a squad of twenty-five policemen gathered in a bunch by the office door.

The moment he made his appearance, Handy cried out excitedly:

"There he is. Shoot down any man who interferes with him, sergeant! By heavens, I'll not be bullied!"

Armstrong laughed aloud as he replied, in a tone to be heard on both sides:

"Don't get excited, Handy. This thing's coming all right. We don't want to shoot any one. Nobody's going to hurt us. Why, these are our old men. They've been in our shop for years. We only want to talk business to them, to settle this matter satisfactorily. Isn't that so, boys?"

"Ay, ay!"

A roar of assent came from the crowd, to which Armstrong replied:

"I knew it was. You don't want to lie idle a week, when you can earn good wages. Now I tell you what we'll do with you all, and Mr. Handy will back me up in what I say. You go away home, all of you, and send a deputation of your foremen and the oldest man in each gang to tell us what you want. That's business. We'll give you an answer. Will that do?"

"Ay, ay," cried the men, eagerly, and in five minutes more the crowd had dispersed, and Handy was whispering to John:

"You fooled them nicely. I'll have a thousand Italians on to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

DOUBLE DEALING.

JOHN ARMSTRONG looked at the manager with glowing eyes.

"Do you suppose I said what I did to deceive these men?" he asked, in a low tone. "No, sir. I had no idea you intended to do such a foolish thing. Italians! Why, they don't know anything about our work. You can't trust them to do a job decently."

Handy set his teeth.

"I can use them to beat those brutes, who want to coerce me. I'll teach 'em that Abel Handy is their master. They've struck for higher wages at a busy time, and I'll be even with them. I'll not take 'em back till they come down ten per cent. on their old wages. The directors will back me. I'm bound to break those fellows. I'll make 'em sup sorrow. I'll keep the shop shut for all the season, but I'll kill their Union."

John heard him through quietly, and then answered him:

"And in the mean time, I suppose, our salaries are to stop. We can't ask the company to pay us when we've nothing in the world to do."

Handy laughed.

"You must be green. Not a bit of it. The company will stand by the men who stand by it. We can afford to pay out fifty thousand dollars in the saving of other wages. We'll take back all the foremen who want to come, and give them the advance, to teach the green-horns; but, between you and me, I'm getting those Italians at a dollar a day."

"They may prove dear at that," said John, significantly. "I suppose you know that your telegram came too late to stop the Pittsburgh contracts. We shall get the first steel next week."

Handy started.

"The deuce! Why did you not go back and repudiate the contract?"

"Because," said John, quietly, "I have a respect for my own word, if not for the reputation of the company. We cannot afford to repudiate, Mr. Handy. In the last two years we've gone to the head of the trade, thanks to Mr. Stryker's death, and we cannot afford to give up our position. We shall make enough on the new contracts to pay the men the advance they ask, and have the advantage of forcing the other firms to do the same or shut up their shops."

Handy looked thoughtful. He had gone into the inner office, leaving the police outside, and they were alone.

"But in that case," he observed, "we shall have to reduce the quarterly dividend."

"And suppose we do," said John, quietly. "The shareholders made thirty-two per cent. last year. If they come down to ten, the stock will remain a good investment, will it not?"

Handy started and his roving eyes wandered over the office, while his mouth twitched as he replied:

"A fellow might do worse than to sell short on the market and get to own a controlling interest—eh, John? We two might make our stake."

John colored slightly as he said:

"I prefer not to understand you. My advice is given in the interest of the company; not for stock-jobbing purposes. If I owned any stock, I should feel at liberty to give it, but it would be a point of honor with me not to buy in stock if it fell in consequence of my advice being taken."

Handy's lip curled with a sneer as he answered:

"You'll never make a business man. You're too scrupulous. Every one does it. That's the way to make a fortune."

"I do not expect to make one that way," replied John, coldly. "A fortune may be won at too dear a price if it leaves a man without his honor. I believe we can afford to compromise with the men and give them the advance. What do you think?"

Handy looked at him keenly.

"I can't quite make you out," he retorted. "There's only one way to justify such a yielding in my eyes. We must fool the directors and make our own stake off it. They'll kick like steers when I make the proposition, and will have to call a special meeting to do it, anyhow. I can stand the row if I see any money in it for myself; but you don't appear to do that."

John Armstrong looked at him as keenly as himself, saying:

"I have told you once, I prefer not to understand you. What shall I say to the foremen, when they come in?"

Handy yawned slightly.

"Oh, put them off. I must have a little time to think over it. We'll call a special meeting for to-night, and give them the answer in the morning. If I find the stockholders obstinate, why, we must fight, and try the Italians. I can get a hundred policemen, if I want them."

"You don't want any," was John's quiet reply. "Send away those you have, and I'll answer for the safety of the shop, but not without. I suppose you know they had a riot at the Excelsior this morning?"

"No. Did they? Glad of it. Shoot a few of these strikers, and the rest will run."

"On the contrary, Mr. Handy, shoot a few of these men, and they will sweep away the police like chaff. Remember the Pittsburgh riots. I don't want to see them repeated here. The men are behaving a good deal better than the employers, so far. They only want to hear reason."

He was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the President of the company, a portly, rubicund old gentleman, who had made his money in banking, bristled in, full of hurry, saying:

"Why, Handy, Handy, how's this? I expected to find a riot going on, and there's not a soul in the street."

Handy rose obsequiously.

"Yes, Mr. Wagstaff. A little ruse of mine. I told them we must have time to call a meeting and give an answer. They agreed to send a deputation and wait till to-morrow. Armstrong, here, thinks we ought to give in."

"Give in!" cried old Wagstaff, angrily. "Give in to a mob of low mechanics like that? What are you thinking of, Armstrong? We shouldn't make half what we did last year."

"And if the strike lasts, we shall not make a cent till it's over, sir," said John, very calmly.

"We've got a thousand Italians ready to go on, at a dollar a day," snapped Mr. Wagstaff. "It will reduce our pay-roll to hire them."

"And as soon as they understand what wages the other men were getting, they will strike, too, sir. We shall need all the men we have, and more, too, to get the contracts through in time, and shall be able to dictate our own terms to any one asking estimates on new jobs, while the men are out."

The old President seemed struck by this argument, and said hastily:

"Do you think so—eh?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. If we stop the strike to-day, we may not make as much money on each job as we did last year; but we shall do three times as much work and make a fair percentage. Profits must come down, Mr. Wagstaff; but we shall not starve."

"No, no, not starve, but— See here, Handy. You understand the trade. I was not brought up to it. Do you advise to give the advance or not?"

Handy hesitated. He was too shrewd to give an answer that might be used against him in case of bad results, so he contented himself by observing:

"There is a good deal to say on both sides, sir. Mr. Armstrong thinks that the dividend would come down to two and a half per cent. quarterly—"

"God bless me! As much as that? Why, we paid eight, last quarter."

Handy looked at him in a peculiar manner ere replying:

"Of course there would be a rush to sell out, sir, and stock might fall to what it was two years ago; but I, for one, should be willing to take all I could get and—"

He was speaking to an old stock-jobber, and Wagstaff's eyes twinkled.

"I see; I see. We'll call a meeting to-night, Handy. I see what you mean."

And with that he hurried out, and they saw him get into his carriage and drive away. Handy laughed.

"Do you know where he's gone?"

Armstrong shook his head.

"To Wall street, to sell out if he can. If he can't, then the men will get the advance. If he does, there will be no meeting to-night. You're too innocent. You might make half a million on this, if you had nerve."

Armstrong shrugged his shoulders.

"What I lack may not be nerve, Mr. Handy. I don't criticise your motives, nor those of Mr. Wagstaff, but I do things differently, that's all."

Then he went out to look over the works, and when he got back to the office Handy said to him:

"You can act your own pleasure about the police, Armstrong."

He was twisting in his fingers a telegram, and added, indifferently:

"By the by, the meeting will be held, and you're invited to be present."

Armstrong nodded, and went away to the sergeant-of-police, to whom he said:

"We shall not want you any more, at all events to-day. Tell your captain that we are much obliged for his kindness. Good-day to you all."

Then he saw the policemen file off, with a sense of relief; and at the same time observed a small group of men opposite break up and disperse, among whom he recognized the figures of Mike Hennessy and Barker.

Then he left the works to go to dinner, and noticed quite a number of newsboys running along, yelling "Extra! Extra!"

The extra sheet turned out to be an account of a serious riot in the morning at the Excelsior Works, in which two policemen had been killed, with seven or eight strikers, though the affair ended by a "victory for law and order," after three platoons of police had been called up from the reserves.

"Mr. Stryker, head of the works," went on the story, "was the object of great hatred on the part of the rioters, on account of a bitter speech made last night. He is closely guarded by the police, and it is rumored that he will be obliged to flee the city, if matters do not mend. The strike has spread to Pittsburgh, and the iron-workers are demanding advances everywhere. The outlook is gloomy for several weak houses."

John read the account, and took a walk after dinner to the Excelsior Works. The street was fuller than it was in the morning, and no police were to be seen; but, as he approached, he was greeted with a wild cheer of welcome, and saw that the men from the Vulcan Shop had joined the other strikers, and had been telling them of their hopes and fears.

As he came near, hundreds of men ran shouting to meet him, and he heard the words from more than one:

"Armstrong, the poor man's friend! He's the boy to cow the bosses. Hooray for John Armstrong! Hooray!"

Then he asked them:

"Where are the police?"

"In the shop, cuss 'em!" cried one of the men, triumphantly. "We druv 'em in, and we're goin' to keep 'em. They can't bulldoze us no more with their clubs."

And John saw that his fears had been realized. The riot had become serious, and the men round him had become exasperated to that pitch, that they were ready to defy all consequences.

He raised his hand for silence, and one of the men called out:

"Speech! Speech! He'll tell us what to do. Armstrong forever!"

Then Armstrong made the first speech of his life, unconscious that he was doing so. It did not seem to him as if he was doing anything at all, though he had attempted addressing college debating societies before, and had always broke down. It did not occur to him till afterward that the reason he felt so cool now was that he knew he was the mental superior of the men round him, while his modesty handicapped him before his classmates.

"See here, boys," he said, "I'm one of yourselves. Two years ago I was a riveter, and I am nothing to-day but a plain workman like you. But I know something you don't. I know that, if you go a step further than you have gone, you will be defying the State of New York, and you can't fight the whole people. You have beaten a squad of police, but you can't beat the State. The soldiers will be ordered out to-night, if they are not coming already, and if they once open fire on you, there will be little children crying for bread to-morrow morning, with no fathers to look to. Do you want to be shot down like wild beasts? If

you don't, my advice is to go home, all of you, and especially the Vulcan men I see about. You can win in the strike if you keep your tempers; but if you try to bulldoze other men, you will lose all you've gained. The Vulcan Company is—I think—going to give the advance. The Excelsior shop will have to do the same or shut up. You have called me to-night by a name which makes me very proud—the poor man's friend. As the poor man's friend, my advice to you all is: go home to-day. You can do nothing here by scowling at the walls of that shop; but you may be held responsible for breeding a riot. Hold a meeting somewhere, choose delegates and send a deputation to Mr. Stryker—"

He was interrupted by a voice:

"Stryker be hanged. He told us he'd see us all starve in the gutter and be glad on it. He called us paupers!"

There was an ominous growl from the crowd, but Armstrong went on:

"So much the better for you. He's put himself in the wrong. Do you want to beat him or not?"

"We do! we do!" shouted the crowd.

"Then take my advice. Scatter and go home. No one knows you yet. I don't see a face I want to recognize; but two policemen have been killed, I hear, and if any one is looking for the murderers, it may be bad for more than one of you. Go home, and do as I tell you, and inside of a week you'll get the advance. See if I'm not right."

He had struck the right chord. In five minutes after the street was empty, and Armstrong saw the policemen coming cautiously out of the works.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STRIKE CULMINATES.

THE police had a worried, anxious look about them, and started up and down the street as if exploring. One of them passed by Armstrong and looked at him curiously, but without the offensive brutality he had shown in the morning. He seemed to recognize in the well-dressed young man one who had a right to be there.

Armstrong, on his part, went up to the door of the works, and asked the sergeant:

"Is Mr. Stryker here yet?"

The sergeant nodded gruffly.

"Yes, he's inside. Are you a friend of his?"

"No. I'm in the Vulcan Works. My name is Armstrong."

The sergeant looked surprised.

"I've heard a good deal about you to-day, sir. These fellows have been shouting for you like mad. They say you've stopped the strike at the Vulcan. Is that true or only a story?"

"I've done my best to stop it. But tell me, sergeant, is it true you had a fight here and killed some men, as they have it in the paper?"

"No, sir. Nobody's been killed, though at one time it looked bad. Between you and me, Mr. Armstrong, we don't like this kind of duty. That Mr. Stryker seems to be trying to coax a fight out of the men. They didn't offer to fight till he came and began to abuse them. If there was older men here to manage, this thing needn't have gone so far."

And the sergeant looked gloomily at the office door, adding:

"He's back there in the works somewhere; with a whole arsenal of guns and pistols. Bless you, there ain't any need of 'em. We only fired over their heads and clubbed one or two of the worst."

"Did you send for the reserve? The paper says you did."

"Not a bit of it. Them reporters never get a thing straight if they can help it. We were going to send one time but the captain came and told us to keep inside the yard; we weren't called on to clear the sidewalk. He don't like it no better than me. We ain't called on to take sides in a strike, as long as the men don't want to hurt nobody. People thinks police is fond of clubbing. It ain't so. Some men gets on the force as ought never to be there, but I never clubbed a man yet that didn't hit me first. Do you want to see Mr. Stryker, sir?"

John hesitated.

"If I thought I could do any good—"

"You might advise him to keep his temper a bit. That would do good."

Armstrong shook his head.

"No. There's only one way. Yet, I'll go in and see him."

And he entered the office and looked round for Stryker, who was nowhere to be seen. A policeman said:

"He's out in the shop, is Stryker, if you're looking for him."

John went into the shop he had not visited for two years, and found Stryker, with his old cronies, Munson and Wheeler, in a sort of fortification made of anvils, where they were mounting guard with three policemen and a profusion of arms. As soon as he saw them he burst into a laugh, crying out:

"Why, gentlemen, one would think you expected an attack."

"So we do," answered Munson, sharply. "You wouldn't laugh if you'd seen those devils

outside, and heard them howling for our blood. But we're ready for them, if they dare to come in—ain't we, Jim?"

"Yes," returned Stryker, in a thick voice, "we'll give the low-lived hounds fits if they come in here. I've got a Gatling coming to-morrow."

"But who's going to fight you?" asked Armstrong. "Do you know that the street's empty outside? The men have dispersed, and the Vulcan managers have made up their minds to give the advance asked for."

Stryker scowled. John could see that he and his friends had been drinking to keep up their courage, while the policemen inside had a stupid look about them.

"The Vulcan can go to blazes," growled Jim. "I don't pattern by them. I say I won't pay the advance. That settles it."

"Then you'll have to go out of the trade," was John's quiet answer. "I'll tell you what I've done. I've sent away all the police, and the men will be at work to-morrow morning. The foundries have agreed to the advance, too. You'll be alone before to-morrow night. That's all I've got to say, except this: Don't show yourself too much on the streets; for some of those ignorant men are very bitter against you, and may follow you up and hurt you. Good-by, now. I'm going back to our works."

And he walked away, leaving the three muddled companions to think over what he had said.

On his way from the Excelsior he very naturally passed up Ashley street, with some notion in his head that he might see Ella Morton; but the house was silent as he passed by it, and he remembered that school hours were not over yet. He looked at his watch; found it to be ten minutes to three, and set off toward the school building, which he reached just as the children were pouring out.

He took a turn up the block till the crowd had passed; looked back; saw the teachers coming down the steps; wheeled round and strode into the group in the most indifferent way, affecting a certain amount of surprise as he raised his hat to Ella and took his way with her toward Ashley street, as if he had done it all his life.

Yet it cost John a severe struggle with his natural bashfulness to do this, and he would hardly have dared it, had it not been for the exciting scenes of the day, which made other things seem trivial in comparison.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong," and Ella's eyes were dancing in her head, while the other teachers kept casting curious glances at the big, handsome fellow beside her as they went off, "where did you spring from, I wonder? I thought you gentlemen of business could not find time to escort ladies home in the afternoon?"

"I could not have done it, perhaps, on any other day than to-day," said John; "but you know our men are on strike."

"No, I didn't know it."

"Don't you read the paper, then?"

"Yes, but I didn't see anything—yes, I remember, now. I did see something of it, but I never associated it with you or your place. I hope they will not do anything violent. It always frightens me to hear of strikes, after those terrible riots in Pittsburgh. You know that was where my poor father was killed, or rather where he died from overwork."

"No, I did not know it, Miss Morton. How was it, may I ask?"

Ella shuddered slightly.

"You know he used to be in the army, and when he came back he went into business at Pittsburgh. And then they got up a Grand Army Post in the city, and he was elected Commander, just before the riots broke out. And after the militia ran away the citizens called on the Grand Army Post to restore order, and then they all mounted guard there over the smoking ruins, till order was restored. And it was on one of those night-guards that father caught a severe cold, took inflammation on the lungs and died three days after the United States troops entered Pittsburgh."

"And how came you to New York, then?" asked John, curiously, then stammered: "I beg your pardon. No business of mine. Beg pardon."

"Needless. The story is simple. My mother is a born New Yorker. We found, after closing my father's business, that we had just two hundred dollars left; and we came here, where mother knew several people who, she thought, would get me into the schools. But it was a hard time we had before I did at last."

"And that frightens you, when you hear of strikes," said John, soothingly. "Well, you need not fear this one. The men are quite quiet, and I hope it will be over to-morrow. Still, please be careful to keep away from the Excelsior or Vulcan works for a few days, till it is all over. The streets are full of idlers, and a good many are drinking, so that there may be trouble within two or three blocks, all round the works."

"Oh, you may be sure I shall not go near either place. I've no reason to go there. I suppose this will keep you away on Friday?"

"On Friday? Oh, yes, commencement. Well, I hardly know. I hope it will be all over by that time."

But John's voice did not sound very hopeful, and presently he added:

"I'm afraid this trouble may interfere with poor Stryker's speech that night, and I should be sorry for that; because I feel that I dislike him, and ought not to allow my dislike to bias me against his talents, which are undeniable."

Ella gave a little toss of her head and a slight pout, as she remarked:

"I'm sure I don't want to hear him, but I should like you to speak."

John smiled awkwardly.

"You told me so before. But I tell you that I don't know what to say."

"Oh, I'm sure if I were you I could find something to say. Don't you ever speak to the men?"

John colored slightly.

"Why, I declare, so I did, this morning. But then that was business, you know. I couldn't get on without it. It didn't seem to me I was making a speech at all. I was just talking to them about what we both felt interested in."

"And isn't that better than making a long speech about something that no one has any interest in?" said Ella, in a brisk way. "I declare I find it easy to speak to my class."

"Ah, yes," responded John, with a sigh, "but you're different, you know. It comes easily to you, because you have been used to it from a child, but I've had to pick it up late in life."

She looked sidewise up at him in a strange way, as she said softly:

"Perhaps you undervalue yourself. It is true you have acquired your education by your own work, but that is no discredit to you. I think it the reverse. And what did you say to the men to-day?"

"I told them that it was foolish for us to quarrel about business; and they saw it as soon as I mentioned the fact. That was the gist of it, I believe. But here we are at your house. How quiet and cosy it looks."

"Yes. Won't you come in?" asked Ella, not without a little palpitation at the thought of her mother's reception.

John hesitated.

"I'd like to do it, very much," he said; "but I fear I ought to be going back to the works. There's no telling what may happen if two hot heads get together; so I'll bid you good-by. If the strike ends this evening I'll come round and let you know."

And he strode off down the street, Ella, in a wistful way, watching him till he had turned a corner, when she opened the door with a sigh, murmuring:

"He doesn't know, and it's lucky he doesn't. It might spoil him."

Meantime John went back to the Vulcan Works, where he found quite a crowd assembled in the street, watching a line of carriages in front of the shop.

John went up to the crowd, saying:

"Go home, boys. You promised not to try any mob law, if I sent away the police, and I've done it. Now give us fair play. Where's the delegation to meet us?"

"It be here," said Steve Barker, grimly, "and a'd have thee know, lad, that if the owd board of directors doan't sign the scale, a ton of steel doan't get worked up in this shop this year. That's sartain."

"And I'd have you remember, Steve," retorted John firmly, "that if we don't work in this shop you and your family will starve. So no threats to me."

With that he walked into the works, and left the crowd of workmen slowly melting away on the other side of the street.

Inside the office, he found no one but one of the clerks, who told him:

"They're all up in the directors' room, sir."

The directors' room was over the office, and it was clear that a meeting had been called, earlier than had been anticipated.

"Did they ask for me?" said John.

"Yes, sir. You were to go up as soon as you came in."

So John Armstrong, Mechanic, a few minutes later, stood bare-headed in the directors' room, before a table full of old gentlemen, some with bald heads, some gray, others white, most with red faces, and all looking more or less excited; for they had been arguing before he came in.

Mr. Abel Handy, a meekly resigned smile on his astute countenance, sat by the chair of President Wagstaff, and the two looked as if they had been undergoing a severe course of questioning.

As soon as Armstrong came in, up jumped a bald-headed old gentleman, chirping:

"Mr. Chairman, here's a young man who can perhaps give us a plain answer to a plain question, if Mr. Handy won't. He knows the whole cost of everything and that's what we want to know. I wish to ask him, sir, through you, whether he has the face to recommend the extortionate terms of these men, determined to ruin us all."

Old Wagstaff looked at Armstrong and said to him:

"You hear Mr. Bolton's question. Tell him what he wishes to know."

John smiled and asked:

"What is it Mr. Bolton wishes to know?"

"Whether you're in favor of this advance—" began Bolton, when Armstrong nodded and observed:

"I am, decidedly. If you don't make it, you will have to shut up the shop. It's not a question of liking. It must be done if we are to go on. That's all, sir."

"I told you so," cried Wagstaff, triumphantly. "It's got to be done, gentlemen, and you that don't like it can take your choice between losing eighty cents on the dollar in stocks, or losing the whole dollar and being called on to make up another."

Then there arose such a hubbub of voices round that table, all talking together, that John could not help thinking to himself:

"There's not much to choose between the men and the bosses. There seems to be about as much temper on one side as the other."

And all the time Handy sat looking on with a covert smile on his shrewd face, and old Wagstaff kept rapping the table, till some one yelled:

"Put the question! Question!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LADDER THROWN DOWN.

JOHN was watching every one, and he saw that the call for the question came from a foxy-looking director with a black beard, one of the youngest in the board, but noted for his astuteness in Wall street.

The hubbub began to quiet down at the call, and the president said:

"The question before the board arises on the motion of Mr. Vulpin, that the manager be instructed to grant the advance. Are you ready for the question?"

There was a silence, only broken by the growl of the bald-headed Bolton:

"Question. Vote it down. Ayes and nays."

Then the question was put to each member, and it turned out that nine were opposed to the advance, with seven in favor of it, so that President Wagstaff declared it lost, at which John's honest face fell, while Handy's countenance exhibited not a trace of emotion.

Then ensued an uncomfortable silence in the board, broken by the president:

"What is the further pleasure of the board?"

"I move," said Mr. Vulpin, slowly, "that the manager be instructed to engage new foremen and hands at his discretion, the aggregate wages not to exceed those paid at present in the works."

"Second the motion," cried Bolton, eagerly. "It's time we taught these fellows they don't control us."

The motion appeared to give satisfaction and was carried unanimously, when Mr. Vulpin proceeded:

"Now, I move that the salaries of the manager and assistant superintendent be raised ten per cent., in consideration of the increased labor devolving on them with the new hands to train."

This also was carried, and Mr. Bolton further moved:

"That the police authorities be asked to detail fifty men to guard the works, till the rebellious men learn their duty to their employers."

John looked round amazed, thinking:

"Surely, they will not pass such a thing as that."

But they did pass it, and the board, in a few minutes after, adjourned; the members going home in their carriages, leaving Wagstaff, Vulpin, Handy and John alone in the board room. As soon as the room was quiet, Vulpin gave a little chuckle, and observed:

"Well, Handy, so you think we're beaten."

Handy scowled.

"I don't care. They'll be sorry for it inside of a week."

"But I tell you we're not by any means beaten," pursued Vulpin, calmly. "If we had granted the advance the stock would have fallen sixty per cent. Now it will go to nothing at all. I'm going to Wall street at once. Any orders, Wag?"

Mr. Wagstaff, who was addressed by this familiar title, growled out:

"Yes. I'm sick of this. Tell Blossom and Sheers to sell me out. I send in my resignation to-night."

Here came a knock at the door, and the clerk looked in to say:

"Deputation of hands waiting for an answer, sir. What shall I say?"

"Tell them we refuse the advance," growled Handy, ill-temperedly. "Tell them to quit."

The clerk hesitated and turned white.

"Please, sir, I daren't."

Wagstaff and Handy jumped up.

"Daren't! Get out. Do as you're told."

They spoke so savagely that the clerk disappeared in a fright. In another moment came a great racket in the office down-stairs, and they heard the clerk shrieking:

"Murder! Help!"

Then Mr. Vulpin turned pale and cried out:

"Go down, Handy. Go down. Order them out. Do you hear, sir?"

Handy laughed sardonically.

"Thank you. Not such a fool. You let the board vote the measure. You take the responsibility. I don't want to get my head broken."

All this time the noise increased, and they heard heavy feet on the stairs. John sat still, feeling utterly hopeless and despairing after the action of the board, till the door was burst open, and into the room rushed Steve Barker, Mike Hennessy, and some twenty others, shouting:

"Where's Handy? Where's Gimlet? We'll fix 'em! We'll fix 'em!"

But Handy had already got behind his desk at the back of the room and now cocked a Winchester rifle, saying sharply:

"Halt! None of that. Get out of this room."

"Shoot if ye dare!" roared Mike Hennessy, savagely. "We come here to meet the board. Where is it? What have ye done?"

"We refuse the advance!" cried Handy, fiercely. "Make the most of it. In five minutes the police will be here. If you're not out, you'll be clubbed out. You've no business in this room. Git."

Vulpin and Wagstaff, very pale, were behind the plucky manager, and Wagstaff called out coaxingly:

"Now go away like good men, do. We'll take you all on again at the old wages, but we really can't afford the advance. It would ruin us; indeed it would."

Steve Barker uttered a furious curse of mingled anger and contempt. He and all the rest were pale with rage.

"Thou'rt a danged old coward," he hissed to Wagstaff. "Happen thou'lt stay if the works till the cops come, or thou'lt get thy head broken. What be ye goan to do—take on scabs?"

"Take on what we please!" cried Handy, defiantly. "Do you understand that? We are going to run these works to please ourselves, not you. Do your worst. If you're not out of this in a minute, I'll open fire."

The men stood hesitating, cowed by the gleaming rifle in spite of themselves, when one of them cried out:

"Where's Armstrong? The lying traitor! He told us we should get the advance."

Armstrong had been sitting in a corner unseen, his face buried in his hands, and now he raised it and said:

"I'm here, boys. Let me speak, and then do what you please."

He was outside the railing and close to them; so that in a moment they had surrounded him with menacing looks, Steve Barker growling:

"Ah, thou scab. Thou'lt fooled us all wi' thy smooth tongue; but thy time's coom at last. Bean't no cops 'ere now."

"Didn't I send them away?" asked the young man, wearily. "Go on; kill me, if you like, all of you. I'll not fight. But that won't get you the advance. If you want to know how it came about, let me speak."

"Speak away," growled Mike Hennessy. "We've got him safe, boys. Let him say his last words. But then—look out."

As he spoke, the foreman of the filers poised in his hands a heavy iron bar, and measured the distance between himself and Armstrong with his eyes, while Steve Barker said, impatiently:

"Speak out, dang thee. Doan't keep us waitin', Jack."

John looked up calmly.

"Did I ever lie to you, men?"

There was a hesitating murmur:

"No—but now—"

"Well, now I'm telling you the truth. Believe it or not, as you please. I never told you the board would grant the advance. I told you that either it would be granted, or the works would close, and you'd have to come down from your terms—"

"But ye said they should have no scabs," shouted Hennessy, savagely, "an' here's Gimlet says they shall."

"You mean Mr. Handy, I suppose—"

"Yes, Handy Andy, Gimlet Eyes, Boss Airish—him I mean, cuss him! He's threatened my life, and I'll have the law on him."

"What you please," returned John, coldly, "but before you kill any one, or go to law, hear reason. Mr. Handy, myself and both these gentlemen wanted the advance given. The board voted no. That settles it. They had a right to do so. They've a right to get cheaper hands if they can; but, as I said I'd have nothing to do with scabs, I stick to it. I shall not be in the works."

This statement produced for the first time a silence among the men, and Handy cried out:

"Don't give an inch to them, John. The board will protect you."

John shook his head.

"I want no protection. It may do for the rest of you, but I'm only plain John Armstrong, Mechanic; and my part is with my fellow-workmen. Mr. Handy, you and I have got on together very well; but I see to-day that the time has come when we must part. I'm on the side of the laborer, you're on the side of the moneyed men. I've seen this strike coming a long time. It had to come. I hoped to have seen it settled as between sensible men, each giving way a little; but I'm not going to stay here and

draw pay for nothing but a fight. I resign my position in the works. If you wish to employ Italians, you can do so; but you cannot depend on me to help you."

Then he turned on Steve and Mike, and pursued gravely:

"As for you, remember what I told you. Keep your tempers and you'll win. I am no longer in the service of the company, so I have no business in this room; but neither have you. I am going away. If you know what is good for you, come with me."

So saying, without another look toward the amazed Handy, he walked out of the room, through the equally amazed workmen, who stood as if not knowing what to do, till he turned at the door.

"Come along, boys. We've no business in the directors' room," he said, in the most matter of fact way.

And without a moment's hesitation, they followed him in dead silence out of the room and into the street, where Mike Hennessy said awkwardly:

"Mr. Armstrong, you ain't no call to get the sack fur us. You're a gentleman now, and it ain't fair—"

John stepped him.

"I hope we're all gentlemen, Hennessy. Gentlemen keep their tempers. We are going to keep ours, I hope, hereafter. I told you that you could beat, and you will. I know, Handy knows, they cannot put Italians to do your work. In three days you will get the advance, if you don't irritate the directors more. You'd better go home now. Have you a meeting-place anywhere?"

"Ay, ay, lad," said Steve, "happen thou'st 'eard tell o' the Union. We're there at eight o'clock every night. Coom in and give us a talk. We want talkers, and thou beest a main good speaker."

John smiled rather sadly.

"I didn't know it, Steve. Well, I'll try to be there. Keep the men away from the works to-night. Hold all the meetings you like, but don't try fighting. It doesn't pay any better for bodies of men than for single men. Good-by."

Then they separated and went home, all gloomy enough, especially John.

He had counted so confidently on the board's yielding, that the disappointment was great to him, added to which he realized that, instead of being in a good position, he had just thrown one up, in a way that rendered it impossible for him to go back. He had taken sides with the weak against the strong, and his prospects of wealth, so brilliant a few days before, had vanished into thin air.

It was therefore with a face on which thought and care were apparent that he greeted his father when he got home; and the elder Armstrong asked anxiously:

"What's the matter, John?"

"I've resigned my position, father," he said, quietly. "They wanted me to play what I knew would be a losing game for them, and I resigned. I shall have to look for work elsewhere."

Then he told his father the whole story, and the old man listened attentively.

When it was over, he remarked:

"That settles it, John. I'm a-goin' back to Painted Post. You don't want no hangers-on, now. I've got 'nuff saved to take me hum, and I'm a-goin' to-morrow."

"There's no need of that, father. I've not been extravagant myself. I graduate in three days, and I can get employment in any of the railroads, I think."

The old soldier shook his head.

"Don't you believe it's so easy. When a man's got a posish, chances are plenty; but when he's outen one folks looks at him diff'runt altogether. I'm goin' back to Painted Post. I kin live on my pension there, with what I kin do at farm-work. Don't you worry fur me, John."

"Well, father," said John, with a slight sigh, "I'll not oppose your wishes; but at least don't go to-morrow. Our board is paid up to the end of the week, and something may happen to put us all in good spirits before that."

"Mebbe, John, mebbe. I don't blame ye fur throwin' up the place. I'd ha' done the same when I was young. It 'u'd be mean to go back on the boys. But I'm thinkin' places won't be plenty now."

John knew that well enough. He had been thinking of it all the way home. He knew that the strike would shut up a good many shops, and that, even as an engineer, he could not hope to get another position as lucrative as the one he had just left. But John Armstrong, educated, had the same simple courage that had kept up the old John without education, and he said to his father:

"Well, father, never mind. If there's a shop left open, I can get work as a riveter, the same as in the old days. Let's go to dinner, and waste no time in grieving. I'm going to a meeting to-night. They want me to speak. Will you come?"

The old man readily consenting, they went to dinner, and, after it was over, set out for Nevada Hall, where the Union meeting was to be

held that night, as John knew, though he had never attended one.

They found it easily enough, and went upstairs to a large room, full of workmen, where their entrance produced a low buzz of interest. Their dress, being so much better than that of most of the men present, at first caused them to be looked on with suspicion; but, before they had found a seat, a buzz went round, and John heard his name called out in several places, till some one shouted:

"Three cheers for John Armstrong, as ain't ashamed of bein' a mechanic!"

And then to the amazement of John, and his father's great pride, a rousing cheer rose in the room, and a man hurried up to them and said:

"You'll have to come on the platform. I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Armstrong. Your presence is worth a hundred men."

CHAPTER XVI.

JOHN'S FIRST SPEECH.

JOHN hardly knew what to say for a moment. He turned crimson in his modesty and stammered awkwardly:

"No, no. I can't—don't ask me. I'm not a speaker. I beg of you."

But the other gentleman, who wore a red badge in his buttonhole, insisted, saying:

"Yes, come along. They will have you. And your friend, too. You'll have to speak. They won't let you off. Say anything you like."

And so John found himself led up to the platform, with the sound of rushing waters in his ears, the room swimming before him, and not the remotest idea of what he was going to say, till he got settled into his place on the platform, with his father beside him.

The old soldier was beaming over his white beard at the crowd, and the men below were staring and whispering to each other, when the chairman came to John and said:

"Who is your friend? The men are curious."

"That is my father," was the answer, and immediately the man with the badge shook hands with old Armstrong vigorously, and whispered something, to which John heard his father reply:

"Why, of course. I ain't no speaker, but I kin say a few words to the boys, while John's gettin' ready."

And then John saw the chairman, a plain, medium-sized man, with a shrewd, sensible face, step to the front and rap on a table, at which a hush came over the assembly, when he said:

"This meeting will please come to order. The special business before us this evening is to hear news of how the battle is going on. We have with us a man who is heart and soul with the workman; who has been a workman himself; who has suffered for our cause. You all know his name. He will address you later in the evening. In the mean time I will introduce to you his father, a man who shed his blood for the Union, a generation ago. He will say a few words of good cheer to you. I have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. John Armstrong, formerly color-sergeant of the Hundred and Ninety-Eighth New York, father of our own John Armstrong, mechanic."

And then John trembled, and felt the sweat running down all over his body, for a mighty cheer went up from the assemblage in front, as the stalwart figure of the veteran rose and confronted the crowd. A moment later, a thrill of unusual coldness passed over him, and he felt calm. His father was speaking, and the room was still as death.

The old man did not seem in the least nervous. One might have sworn that he was an old orator, from the ease with which he surveyed the crowd; and his voice was strong and clear as he began:

"I ain't what's called a speaker, boys, but I larned in the army that a man can allers obey an order if he don't give way to the fear that's born in us all. We're all more or less cowards at heart, and I never seen the man yet that didn't lie if he said he never was skeered. We old boys, twenty years ago, used to be skeered enough, I tell you; but we went ahead fur all that, and we won the day at last. So, to-night, I don't deny but what, when this gentleman axed me and my son to speak, I felt skeered. I was skeered fur John and myself. We ain't speakers. I never spoke in my life afore to a lot of men. But then, I says to myself, every man's got to have his first battle, and he'll get through it somehow. Arter that, he finds it ain't as bad as he thought. I come here to-night to see you all, boys, and wish ye good luck. I were raised in Steuben county, and follered the wheel-right-in' trade. My son John he follered me, and he's rose above me; 'cause he's got su'thin' I didn't see no chance to get—eddicacion. But I got su'thin', twenty year ago, none of you, p'raps, got to-day, a lesson in fightin' and stickin' to the colors. We was right in that fight and we knowed we'd win if we stuck to it long enough. You've got another fight ahead of you, but if you're right you're a-goin' to win. All I've got to say to ye is this, boys: Stick to your colors, and stay in the ranks. Don't go off foragin'

and robbin' hen-roosts. Don't straggle on the road. There's only one place where a man's safe in the army, and that is in the ranks by the colors. As long as the boys stick together the enemy can't whip 'em; for they don't stay whipped. I don't know much about this strike of yours, except what I see in the papers, but I know I'm on the side of the man as makes the money all the time, against him as only spends it. I'm thankful to you for listening to me as quiet as you have; for I know I can't give you a good talk, as John can, but all I'll say in conclusion is this: He's been a good son to me, and a good son can't be a bad man. He ain't 'shamed of his old father because he wears fine clothes, and he's going to speak to you now, right off, and tell you more than I can, because he knows what's the matter."

And the old man bowed, with a flushed face and a smile of triumphant excitement on his lips, while the workmen applauded vehemently as he sat down by John and squeezed his son's hand.

"Give it 'em good, John," whispered he, as the applause subsided into silent expectation. "Tell 'em what they want to know. It's only the fust battle, boy. You're all right."

And, in truth, the homely vigor of the old soldier, and the enthusiasm which it had aroused, had put a new spirit into John. He felt proud of his father, and also began to see the secret of success in public speaking.

"Tell them what they want to know."

The words seemed to be standing out in letters of fire on the walls of the hall as he rose, amid a dead hush, to speak; and he was amazed at his own coolness.

"Men," he began, "I came here to-night to listen, not to speak. I thought that you, who began this strike, knew beforehand what would be the cost of the movement; that you had calculated the odds, and were prepared for a long struggle. I got back to the city to day, to find the works closed and the men on strike, with police at the gates and the managers of the works doing all they could to taunt and exasperate the men into acts of violence. I found a fight going on in one place, and I was able to stop a quarrel in another. Did it never occur to you, that when you go into a disturbance, you are playing into the hands of your enemies? They want to coax a fight out of you, to give them an excuse to call in the police; to set public opinion against you; to call you ruffians. Yet, if you only keep your tempers, you are sure to win in the end. You are lying about the streets, idle, ready for a fight; and as long as you are idle, you are wrong. Because you cannot get the advance in pay at your own special work, there is no reason why you should not do other work and earn money to support your families in the mean time, instead of eating up your little savings, if you have any, and getting poorer all the time. The bosses want to see you idle. They want to see you poor. They count on the time when you will be so poor that you will have to take the old wages or less, or starve. Take a leaf out of their book if you want to win. Do they hang about the streets and talk? No. They try to get other men to do their work. Very well. If you try to get other work, no one can oppose you. You can keep up your union and carry on the strike through that. You have gone to them so far. Now let them come to you. I am out of my situation. Well, what do you suppose I'm going to do? What would any of you have done last week, had he been discharged? Why, look for another place of course. Do that, all of you. Never mind if it be a poorer place. It's better than starving. I don't expect to get as good a place as I had this morning; but I expect to make a living; and when a man can do that, he can wait. Can you afford to wait long? Not while you're idle. But if you are able to live in the mean time you can carry out this strike. The work can only be performed by skilled labor, and green hands will spoil it. The price will go down, and the owners be ruined. Do you suppose the bosses can stand that, any better than you can stand starvation? Not a bit of it. My advice to you all is this: Disperse over the city to-morrow, and let every man look for work in something. Take anything honest that will keep the wolf from the door. But keep up your union. Take my word for it. Every one will help you, if they see you are helping yourselves, and before next week the bosses will be coming to you for a compromise. That is all I have to say to you to-night, except to thank you for your silent attention. My words may not be welcome to some; but I am telling you the truth. In a fight it will never do to undervalue your enemy, nor to act as he wishes you. The bosses want to see you hang around the gates like paupers. Don't please them by doing it. They want you to fight, so that you may be clubbed by the police. Keep away from them and they will have to send the police home. But above all, look for other work, so that you may be independent, and able to wait. Keep cool, and you'll win."

And John bowed and sat down, his calmness once more deserting him, for he felt himself trembling all over.

But he had made his first speech, and it had

been listened to in dead silence, only interrupted by applause, when he told them that they would win in the end.

He had not excited any enthusiasm such as had been raised by his father, but the men had listened as if they were afraid to lose a word, and when it was over a subdued buzz went up all over the room as the workmen discussed the merits of the speech.

Then came a rather awkward pause, the chairman going round the platform whispering to several men, who shook their heads, till he came again to John, and said, with a smile of amusement:

"They're afraid to speak after you. If some one don't speak we shall have to adjourn the meeting."

"That may be the best thing to do," said John, quietly. "We can't do anything that I can see that would be useful."

The chairman looked puzzled and rueful.

"But we're used to two-hour meetings."

"And they have made half the trouble," quoth John, dryly. "Ask them what they want."

The chairman advanced to the front.

"What is the further pleasure of this meeting? If there is no news to be communicated I am ready to hear a motion to adjourn."

And then uprose, in the body of the house, Mike Hennessy, who said, slowly:

"Mr. Chairman, I don't see as how we c'u'd do better than go home. Mr. Armstrong's been givin' it to us straight, and he and me worked in the same shop two year. Fu'st time I seen him I made a mistake. I said suthin' 'bout his father, the old gent as spoke here to-night. I want to take that back right here, and I'm goin' to look for a job to-morrer. Move we adjourn, sir."

A few minutes later the hall was nearly empty of people; and John was coming out with his father, the chairman congratulating him on his speech, and asking him to come often.

When they were outside and walking slowly home, old Armstrong remarked, as he squeezed his son's arm:

"John, ye did well. I was orful skeered fur ye, or mebbe I couldn't ha' spoke as long as I did. Fact, I furgot all 'bout myself, fearin' you'd break down. You jest astonished 'em."

John drew a long breath.

"Do you know why, father? Because I forgot about myself in you, and because I saw those poor fellows were all groping in the dark, not knowing which way to turn. Ah, what a lucky thing I met Mr. Baldwin two years ago. I might have been like them to-night."

Then he walked on, buried in thought, for several blocks, when he suddenly said:

"Do you know I've made up my mind to something, father?"

"What is it, John?"

"To go to the top of the ladder, and show my fellow-workmen how to follow. I'd have done it before, if I'd thought I could speak, but I've always broken down. Now I know I can do it. Come on, father. I'm going to make a call."

"Where, John?" asked the old man, wonderingly, for there was a new ring in John's voice as he stepped out briskly.

"I'm goin' where we went the other night, to Mrs. Morton's," answered John. "She told me—that is, her daughter did—that I ought to speak. I didn't believe I could do it, but now I know I can. I'm going to tell them I've done it."

The old man shook his head.

"Don't ye do it, John. Too much like blowin' yer own horn. Let 'em hear of it from some one else."

"You're right, you're always right, father. You made me all I am," returned John, warmly. "I was a fool to think of it, but somehow I feel so strange to-night. I want to see some one, to do something. I'm restless."

"That's jest it, John. I used to feel the same when we was a-layin' in front of old Fredericksburg, a-waitin'; but I l'arned we had to obey orders, or we'd get beat every time. You jest come home and hev a game of checkers. That'll cool ye off amazin'."

And they walked along in silence till the old man suddenly exclaimed:

"Hain't I been in this street afore? Yes, surely. Why, John, this is where we was the other night, and that's the very house. How'd you come to go this way?"

They were in Ashley street, whither John had, half-unconsciously, bent his steps, and now he looked confused and tried to excuse himself, when they heard a sudden cry in the street behind them, followed by the report of a pistol; and a man came running up from what John knew to be the direction of the Excelsior Works, followed by several others, shouting and cursing savagely.

"What's that?" cried old Armstrong, and he went for his pistol-pocket with the old instinct of a soldier, only to find that he was unarmed.

John drew him to one side as the man and his pursuers came tearing up the street, and a moment later James Stryker ran panting up, a pistol in his hand, and started at seeing them, calling out, as he pointed his pistol:

"Back, back! don't try to stop me or you're both dead men!"

CHAPTER XVII.

BEATEN TO A JELLY.

STRYKER looked wild and haggard, and his hand trembled so he could hardly point the pistol; but Armstrong saw that he was going to fire in his excitement, and he pulled back his father out of the way, when the young man set off running again, just as his pursuers came to the end of the block, seven or eight in number, yelling out furious execrations.

But, in the extremity of his confusion, the hunted man, instead of keeping straight on, turned the corner and dashed down to the river, at which his pursuers gave a howl of triumph and came rushing past the Armstrongs, not appearing to notice them.

Then John heard a voice shout:

"Now we've got him on the dock. We've got him. Drown the villain! Kill him!"

And away they went down the side street to the dock, when John cried to his father:

"They're Excelsior men. They'll do him a mischief if we don't help him. Will you come on?"

"You bet," was the old soldier's answer, and without another word he was off down the street, where John and his father heard ahead of them, the sounds of a savage fight going on.

"Pick up a club, John—suthin'—anythin'!" panted the old man as he ran on. "Can't do nothin' without. Ah, there's the ticket."

He darted across the street and picked up a couple of bricks from a loose pile, then ran on the pier, just as a bullet came whistling by his head, and they heard the sound of a heavy blow, followed by a yell of pain.

"Cops comin'! Cops comin'!" cried old Armstrong, as loud as he could bawl. "Git, all of ye, or they'll ketch ye."

And as he spoke he cast his bricks into the midst of a struggling group of men, which broke up in a moment, and father and son were beset by one of those desperate crowds that collect all in a moment and disappear as suddenly in the back slums of the city, men crazy with fury and bad rum, who hardly knew what they did in their frenzy.

Then John, for the first time in two years, found himself fighting as he had never fought before, using every trick he had ever learned, fighting with fist, foot and head, his strength taxed to the utmost, till, just as suddenly as the fight had begun, it ended with the cry of "Cops," and the whole gang ran away, leaving John and his father on the pier, the old man waving a club of wood he had picked up somehow, while John felt faint and sick, and realized that he must have received some injury in the fight.

What it was, he found out later, when his father came to him, saying anxiously:

"What's the matter, John? Ye hurt? Why—if they ain't cut the boy! Here, come under the gas-lamp. Yes, by jiminy. It's a stab, and no mistake. We got to get that tended to quick. Lucky Miss Morton's near by. Come quick."

John had received a stab in the left arm, from which the blood was dropping on the pier, but he said firmly:

"Not yet. There's poor Stryker. Maybe he's been killed. Look for him. He needs attention more than me. I'll tie my handkerchief round—so—that's all right. Go find him, father."

The old man unwillingly departed, and came back, a moment later, looking as if he had seen something horrible.

"By gosh!" he said, shuddering. "They've e'ena'most killed the pore feller, as you said. He's all out about the head, and his face swelled up, so's mother wouldn't know him. Wonder what it were for?"

"Some spite," said John. "I wish the police would come. We want to send for an ambulance at once."

But, as usual in such cases, no sign of police was to be seen; and the end of it was that John had to give his father the direction of the nearest station, and the old man trudged off to find it, leaving the wounded John to take care of his insensible enemy of old times.

John felt pretty weak and very cold, as his father's form disappeared. Poor Stryker was breathing heavily, but quite insensible; and his face, by the light of the lamp, was a horrible sight, all bloated and disfigured with cuts and bruises, that showed he had received a fearful beating, while his dress was hanging in tatters, and his body was covered with blood and mire.

"Poor Stryker," thought John. "He'll never be vain of his looks again. But I wonder how he got into this trouble, and where are the police he had, round the works?"

That was the mystery—also, how he came to be alone in the streets, and who were the men who had assaulted them.

In the darkness and confusion, John had not recognized any of them. He knew that he had given several knock-down blows, and had stunned one man so that he had to be helped off; but, beyond the suspicion that they were work-

men who had a spite against their employer, he had no notion of their identity.

After awhile, as he sat there, Stryker stirred and groaned slightly, when John spoke to him.

The half-unconscious man shivered and shrunk back, as if expecting a blow, when John said gently:

"Don't be afraid, man. They're gone. Who was it struck you?"

Stryker groaned again. He had recovered his senses enough to ask:

"Who's that?"

"It is I, Armstrong, your classmate. How came those men after you?"

Stryker did not appear to hear him. He only groaned out:

"Oh, my head! I'm blind. I can't see. For God's sake get me some water. It was my own fault. I ought to have staid in."

Then he tried to rise, and fell back weakly.

"Oh, take me somewhere, anywhere," he moaned, impatiently. "Let me die quietly."

"You won't die at all, man," said the other, encouragingly. "I've sent for the ambulance for you. You've been beaten badly, but that's nothing. It's only bruises. I don't think you've any bones broken. How did it happen?"

"I tried to get home by the backway," said Stryker, faintly. "They were waiting for me in Ashley street, and chased me. I shot at them, but it made them worse. Oh, dear, I shall die here, I'm sure I shall."

Then he began to sob and moan in a way that showed he was completely cowed for the time, his nervous system shattered, if indeed he were not seriously hurt.

He shivered and shook so that John began to fear for him, and at last said to him:

"Stryker, do you think you could walk a few steps? It's a cold night, and you'll get frozen here. Somebody may let us into a house till the ambulance comes. My father has gone for it."

Stryker only moaned out:

"I can't walk. I'm beaten to a jelly."

"Try it," urged John. "I'll help you."

And he assisted his old enemy to rise, when Stryker staggered and nearly fell; but succeeded in walking slowly off the dock, groaning at every step, till they reached the side street and came to the corner by which Mrs. Morton lived.

Here John hesitated and looked anxiously up and down the street. Had he heard the most distant rumble of wheels he would have felt happy, but the streets were perfectly silent, and a groan from Stryker decided him.

"Oh, heavens, must I die for want of help? Won't any one let us in?"

John took a sudden resolution.

"I must do it, Stryker. You know Mrs. Morton, I believe. She lives here. I'll ask her to let you rest till the ambulance comes, in her house."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the beaten man. "Where is it? I can't see. They've blinded me. Quick, for heaven's sake!"

And he was sinking down exhausted, when John gathered him up on his right arm, and half-led, half-carried him to the foot of Mrs. Morton's steps.

There was a light burning in the parlor, for it was not yet ten o'clock, and John saw the figure of the old lady herself at the window, peering out. He suspected she had heard some of the noise outside, and was wondering what it was all about, so he called out:

"Mrs. Morton, please, madam, here is a man hurt badly. Let us in for one moment, till the ambulance comes."

Whether she understood or not through the glass he could not tell, but she went away from the window, and presently looked out of the door, timidly, saying:

"What's the matter? Don't think we haven't any men in the house. Go away, or I shall sound an alarm."

She was shutting the door, when John cried out:

"For heaven's sake, listen. Here is a friend of yours hurt. We're waiting for the police ambulance, and it's so cold I fear he'll sink before it comes."

The door was nearly closed, and the old lady called out through the crack:

"Who is it?"

"Mr. James Stryker, madam. He has been assaulted by his workmen."

Then the door opened a little.

"And who are you, young man?"

"John Armstrong, madam. Don't delay, please. I tell you the man may die if he doesn't get into a warmer place."

For a keen March wind was making John himself shiver through his ulster.

Then the old lady opened the door and said, coldly:

"If that is the case, come in. You must excuse my suspicions; but we are all alone, as you know."

John shook Stryker, and found him, to his alarm, limp and senseless.

He stooped down to get his uninjured arm round the other, and lifted him on his hip, in which way he carried him up the steps into the hall, and laid him down, saying briefly:

"Thank you, madam. Don't stay by us. It is no sight for a lady."

But the old lady had already caught sight of Stryker's disfigured face, and she uttered a slight cry of sympathy:

"Oh, poor fellow."

Then she pointed to the parlor.

"Take him in there. I was used to such sights and worse twenty years ago. I will get water. Don't be afraid. We'll take care of him. I'm an old nurse."

The sight of actual suffering had melted her, and she went away at once, calling up-stairs:

"Don't come down, Ella. It's no sight for you, child. Keep where you are."

Now that they were in a strong light, John could see that Stryker's eyes were closed from huge bruises that puffed up cheek and brow, that his head was all bloody, his body covered with contusions, but no cuts to be seen, save on face and head.

"Not so bad as I thought," he muttered; and with that dragged the insensible man into the parlor near the stove, whose warmth was very grateful to himself as well as Stryker.

Presently Mrs. Morton came in with her servant girl, carrying a pail of water and a basin, when she waved John aside, saying briefly:

"I know what to do. You look for the ambulance."

Her manner was cold and constrained, and John withdrew, mortified and puzzled, while the old lady proceeded, with a skill born of old practice, to wash the blood from Stryker's face and head, while she examined his hurts carefully. John, not knowing how to take her, went out into the hall and thence into the street, when he heard the distant rumble of wheels at last.

He knew, from the rapid tramp of the galloping horse, that it was the long expected ambulance, and it came tearing down the street to the corner, when he hailed it, crying:

"This way. He's in this house."

Then the police vehicle drew up at the door, and out jumped a young man, who ran up the steps and into the house, saying sharply:

"Where's this case? Ah, here. Thanks, madam, I'll relieve you. A friend of yours—eh? Ah!" [feeling rapidly] "limbs all right—no fracture—let me see—cuts—superficial—contusions—extravasated blood—is he insensible?—don't look so—here, young man!"

And he shook Jim sharply.

"Wake up! What's the matter with you? Been fighting? How do you feel?"

But all he could get out of Stryker was a groan, and he began to examine his head closely. Presently he looked up at Mrs. Morton.

"Your son, madam?"

"No, sir," was the frigid answer. "Only an acquaintance. Brought in here. Is he seriously injured?"

The doctor scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"He's had a good beating; but there is no fracture of the skull. Can't account for the insensibility. May be concussion of the brain, may be shock. Ought to be kept very quiet. May hurt to move him. Could you keep him a day or two, till we can take him to the hospital?"

The old lady bowed her head coldly.

"Certainly, if it be necessary. If you have any man to help, he can stay in this room. We are only three women in this house."

The doctor nodded.

"Many thanks. Yes. I'll send in the cot at once, and we'll get him into bed, if you don't object to having him in the parlor."

"In the cause of humanity I do not," answered the old lady; "but as soon as he can be moved, of course I should prefer it."

"Certainly, certainly, madam."

Then the doctor bustled in and out, and before five minutes were over Stryker was lying in a cot on the parlor carpet, and John Armstrong met the severe glance of Mrs. Morton's brown eyes, as she said pointedly to him:

"Good-night, sir. I hope you are satisfied, now that the gentleman is safely in bed in my house. Repentance may come too late after passion, but I will do my best to save this poor young man from the consequences of your ungoverned temper."

She spoke these words after the doctor had gone, when John stood hesitating on the doorstep, and she shut the door in his face as she concluded, giving him no opportunity, in his amazement, to say a single word in defense.

Then he stood staring blankly at the door, and exclaimed at last:

"Is it possible she thinks I did it? And he is in there! In the house! Ella will nurse him, perhaps. What shall I do to set her right?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SET UP THE LADDER AGAIN.

POOR John Armstrong went home that night in a frame of mind the reverse of cheerful. Out of a place, with a stab in the arm; his rival—for he felt in his heart that James Stryker was his rival—installed in Ella's house in the character of a patient, while Ella's mother looked on him—John—as a brute who had set on the young man out of envy. It was hard. For the first time perhaps in his career he felt thoroughly despondent, and it was not till he got home that he paid any attention to the cut on his arm, on

which the blood had dried so that his shirt was stuck fast to it, and he started the bleeding again as he pulled it off.

But his father had seen too many of such and far more serious hurts to feel frightened about a mere flesh cut, and he soon had it washed and bound up, observing as he did so:

"If ye never get no worse nor that, ye're lucky, John. Go to bed and sleep it off. It'll be sore for a month, mebbe; but your flesh'll heal quick."

And next morning, when John came down to breakfast, he noticed that all the people in the boarding-house looked curiously at him over their newspapers, and found that his speech to the workmen had been reported in full, while another paragraph gave an equally full account of the beating of Stryker and his rescue by Armstrong, in such a clear and truthful way that John exclaimed involuntarily:

"Where did they get that, I wonder?"

Hearing a suppressed chuckle beside him, he saw his father beaming at him and asked hastily:

"Did you give it to them, father?"

"You bet I did," was the reply. "I wasn't goin' to hide your light, boy, if you do hide it yourself. I give it 'em straight at the station-house."

And when they were in their own room he told John:

"Them reporters is curi's fellers. I used to think they'd rather tell a lie any time than the truth, but that feller at the station he took down all I said, and I see it's printed straight. Didn't seem to want to lie at all. Waal, John, what be ye goin' to do to-day?"

"Look for work, father. I think I can get it somehow. Anyway I'm going to try my best. You amuse yourself the best you can, while I'm gone."

And he strode forth into the keen March wind to look for employment, with just as good a heart as he had shown two years before, ready to begin again at the bottom of the ladder, and repining no more for the loss of his place of the day before than if had never held it.

But John was destined to find, that day and many another after, the truth of his father's warning that people look differently on a man in a place and the same person out of one.

Everywhere he met rebuffs, and in more than one shop positive insults from the employers, as soon as he had spoken his name.

They all seemed to know him, and to know that he was on the side of the men in the strike. His speech had excited attention and criticism everywhere. Before the week was out he discovered that he was the object of bitter animosity and suspicion on the part of every iron-worker in the trade, and that there was absolutely no hope for him to obtain work from any of them.

As soon as this dawned on his mind, he came home and told his father:

"We are going to have a harder fight than I thought, and I must economize. If you wish to go back to Painted Post, I will not oppose it. I have three hundred dollars savings. Take half, and I will do what I can with the rest. As soon as I am established again, I'll send for you."

So they parted, and John felt more lonely and deserted than ever, as he trudged from place to place, looking for work. To add to his troubles, his arm inflamed and the wound took on a bad appearance, so that he could not pretend to be able for manual labor, and thus passed on four long weary weeks, during which the strike became more general, the deadlock more hopeless.

He went every evening to the Union to counsel patience, and kept away from the works in the daytime, while his prediction came true that the strikers would find everybody out of the trade willing to give them work, and that the green hands would not answer for iron-workers.

But, as the days and weeks went on, and his money melted away, with board and doctor's bills, he began at last to feel gloomy and desperate, when, one day, rambling in the lower part of the town he met face to face no other than Mr. Vulpin, director, coming out of Wall street into Broadway.

With a slight nod he was passing on, when Vulpin suddenly accosted him:

"Why, it is Armstrong, of course. Well, well, you look as if you'd been ill. What's the matter with you?"

His manner was overpoweringly cordial, and he seized John's hand and pressed it caressingly as he spoke.

John looked at him coldly and told him he had had an accident, a lame arm, when Vulpin interrupted him:

"I suppose you know there's a new deal in Vulcans, Armstrong?"

"No, sir. I've not been watching."

"Well, there is. Wagstaff, Bolton and a lot of others, determined not to yield, sold out in disgust. What do you think the stock brought?"

"I've no idea," answered John, coldly.

Mr. Vulpin took him by the arm and whispered, confidentially:

"Don't say I said it; but it went off at thir-

teen, and it was a hundred and eighty-five before the strike."

"Well?" asked John, seeing that he was expected to say something.

"Well? The stock is all in the hands of two men now, Handy, President, and Vulpin, Secretary. We want a new manager. Will you come back and take Handy's old salary?"

For a moment John's heart leaped wildly; but then he said:

"It would be useless, unless we can grant the advance."

Vulpin pressed his arm.

"That's just what we're going to do," he said, in a burst of confidence. "We can set up the market and send the stock up to ninety at once; then get out before we begin to lose money."

John looked at him amazedly.

"Do you really mean it?"

"Of course I do. Will you take the offer? If so, come up to the works and we'll open tomorrow morning."

Then John felt the tears coming into his eyes, and he said huskily:

"Thank you. I will come. I am glad you've come to that conclusion. But do you know that I see no necessity of your losing money? The works can be run at a profit of ten per cent. after paying the advance."

Vulpin shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps. I'm not anxious on that score. We'll make money on it, anyhow. Come along up to the works. There's a stage."

And half an hour later John Armstrong was in the old familiar shop, where he had seen and learned so much, and Handy was shaking his hand violently, saying:

"What a simpleton you were when you might have drawn your salary all this time, to be going round to mechanics' meetings. You thought we were down on you. Not a bit of it. Why, John, you're worth your weight in gold to us. I'm not sorry you took the part you did. You can have the pick of the hands now, for a good week. Stryker's down sick, they say, and he can't hurt us, and as to the rest, they're just sulky enough to spite themselves. Now I'll tell you what I want done."

And they went to work in the office over plans and estimates, with the result that John saw an infinity of work before him, enough to frighten a weaker man, but at which he smiled as he said:

"I think we can do it, Mr. Handy. I'll do my best. But above all I'm glad for the men."

And that afternoon they parted in the best of spirits, while, the same evening, John made a speech at the Union which set the men yelling with delight; for he told them that the strike was over at last and that the advance was granted.

How they cheered him! How they cheered Handy and Vulpin, who were introduced to the meeting! The strike was over, and one could only tell the suffering it had caused by going into the homes of the poor workmen who had been out in it.

That strike caused the death of hundreds of children, while more than one mother had succumbed to poor food, bad air, insufficient fire. Old Steve Barker was right when he said to John:

"Ay, ay; it's over, but we'll ne'er forget it, we as was in it. There's them we laid under the daisies 'll ne'er coom back, lad, and happen time 'll coom when we'll miss 'em more and more."

He said this in the midst of a group of workmen; but John answered gravely:

"We all must die, Steve. It cost three hundred thousand lives to kill slavery in this country; but they were well spent. We're fighting the battle of the future, boys, freedom for all to live and enjoy the gifts God sends us so freely. Let the dead sleep. They're happier than we are, for we have to fight on and suffer on, year after year, till our time comes. The point is that we've won the victory. It is worth the price we paid. We have taught money that labor is not its slave. The lesson was needed."

And then they separated and went home with joy in their hearts; and next day the Vulcan Works were in full blast, crammed to their full capacity with the best workmen in the city.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

SOME weeks after John Armstrong took his seat at the manager's desk of the Vulcan Works, James Stryker, pale and feeble-looking, but with a face no longer disfigured with bruises, was sitting in an easy-chair at No. 143 Ashley street, listening to Ella Morton reading, while Mrs. Morton was knitting stockings in the homely, old-fashioned style of former days, and glancing over her spectacles, at every second stitch, at Jim and Ella.

Yes, James was there still, and clearly on a pretty intimate footing. The swelling and discoloration had gone from his face, he was as handsome as he ever had been, and he had the air of one perfectly at home, while the pleasant spring breeze came in at the parlor window and he lay back in his easy-chair, dressed in the nattiest of velvet smoking-jackets, with em-

broidered slippers on his feet, listening to Ella read the paper, for it was Saturday morning and there was no school to employ her.

Presently she came to a paragraph which she read with peculiar zest.

"Since the Vulcan Iron Company has resumed operations the Pittsburg works have reopened and the strike may be said to be virtually over. The Excelsior Works it is said, are to be sold to a new company, which is in the process of formation."

"Is that true, Mr. Stryker?" asked the older lady, lifting her glasses toward him.

Stryker colored slightly.

"Yes. I'm tired of it. Why should I work when I've got enough money to live on and take my ease? My uncle thought he could keep me at it by the terms of his will, but I've fulfilled the conditions now. I've graduated, and the works are mine, to do as I please with."

"Then I suppose hereafter you intend to play gentleman?" said Ella, in a tone of slightly sarcastic inquiry.

"I intend to live as one," he answered. "I shall go to Europe and try to enjoy life a little. I've slaved it long enough, and I'm tired. I want excitement. Who knows? I may go into politics. I'm told I stand a good chance."

Mrs. Morton looked at him approvingly.

"That would be better. I don't like idle young men, and you can speak well. I think every young man should go into politics if he can afford it. We want gentlemen in the government, instead of those low demagogues who hold the power by the foreign vote."

Ella looked at her mother in a way that had a spice of rebellion in it, but said nothing; and Jim answered:

"You've a pretty good specimen of that in a person who shall be nameless. I understand he's become quite a power among those fellows who so nearly killed me, since they took him back at the Vulcan Works."

The old lady raised her hand.

"Don't mention him, please. I can't bear to hear of him since that night. Your generosity prevents you from saying what I feel certain is the truth, that it was he who led the ferocious attack on you—"

Ella suddenly flung down her paper.

"How can you say so?" she asked, with flashing eyes. "Have you a shadow of evidence to support the accusation? Why, even Mr. Stryker does not say it."

"No, because he is too generous," was her mother's cold reply. "But you observe he will not say whom he suspects."

"Because he knows that John Armstrong is not capable of such a deed," cried Ella, hotly. "Answer, Mr. Stryker, if you have any manliness. Do you dare accuse John Armstrong of being your assailant?"

Stryker hesitated before saying:

"I accuse no one, Miss Ella. I know that I was assaulted and nearly killed, but it was in the dark, and I could not recognize my assailants. But it was one of them brought me here. I was not sensible when I came here and could not tell who it was—"

"Are you sure you were not sensible?" asked Ella, sharply.

He colored as he replied:

"I just said so. The man who brought me here must have been one of them. I do him the justice to say that he did not want to kill me. He and his gang let their spite outrun their prudence, and no doubt felt frightened at what they had done. But please observe that he has not dared to come here to ask after me ever since. I accuse none; but you must admit it looks very suspicious."

Ella heard him through, and then folded up the paper deliberately, as she replied:

"Very well. I see that my mother and you have made up your minds. I have made up mine, too. I will never believe John Armstrong assaulted you till he tells me so with his own lips. Good-morning."

And she swept out of the room and they heard her going up-stairs. James looked mournfully at Mrs. Morton.

"You see. She is immovably set in her prejudices. We'd better drop the subject. Have you spoken to her on the other, dear madam?"

The old lady nodded.

"Yes. I have hopes, but I cannot force her inclinations. It depends on your own conduct. Ella is a peculiar girl, quite romantic. I believe that you have fully reformed your ways—"

"Indeed, indeed I have," he said, earnestly; "for love of her I would do anything in the world. I will make her mistress of everything wealth can buy. She shall go to Europe, the East, all over the world if she wants to. You shall go with her. I will not separate you for a single day. But I do think that you might be on my side and help me—mother."

And he looked languishingly at the old lady, whom he had managed to bring over pretty completely already.

She fidgeted about, feeling guilty.

"I'm sure I've done all I can for you. But why don't you do something for yourself? She admires Armstrong for his courage and looks. You were once his superior. You were a speaker, he an awkward boor. But it seems

that he has learned to speak, and Ella believes it is all for love of her. Do something to make her admire you."

"How can I?" he objected. "She looks on everything I do with suspicion. I'd tell her I love her, but I'm afraid—"

"That's just it," said the shrewd mother: "you're afraid. Tell her and don't be afraid. I hear her coming down-stairs now. I'll give you an opportunity. No woman dislikes to be told that a man loves her more than all the rest of the world. Tell her, and leave the rest to me. I'm going."

And Mrs. Morton rose to leave the room, just as Ella entered it again, with her hat on, dressed for a walk.

"Why, Ella, where are you going?" asked her mother, surprised and disconcerted.

"Out for a walk. I've some shopping to do," she replied, shortly. "Do you want anything?"

"No," answered the old lady, hesitatingly. "But I thought you were going to read to Mr. Stryker—"

"Mr. Stryker is getting better, mother. Air and exercise are what he wants, according to Doctor Brown. Good-by."

And before her mother could recover from her astonishment she had left the house and was walking rapidly down the street, while Jim Stryker uttered a low curse between his teeth, and Mrs. Morton said resignedly:

"She's a strange girl. This teaching school tends to make girls very independent. I wish Ella was safely—"

She was going to say "married," but stopped in time; for, though Jim had succeeded in blinding the old lady to all his old faults, she had not yet turned against her daughter.

As for Jim, if the truth must be told, he had been well for more than a week; had not been insensible when he came to the house, but was shrewd enough to perceive the advantages offered by the position of interesting invalid to use them to the utmost. How he had managed to retain his place in the house was a mystery known only to Mrs. Morton and himself; but he had done so with considerable success and lay there in the easy-chair now, revolving schemes to retain his hold and improve it.

In the mean time, Ella went swiftly down Ashley street, and turned into a broader one that led into the business portion of the city, a slight frown on her fair young brow, her lips closely compressed, looking angry and excited.

She had taken a bold resolution, and was trying to screw up her courage to the point of keeping it, while her natural womanly delicacy tried to keep her back all the while.

John Armstrong had not been near the house since the night he brought Jim Stryker to the door, and her mother had interpreted the fact to his disadvantage, while the artful Stryker had made the most of it. Ella had made up her mind, on the impulse of a moment, to go and see Armstrong, telling him all.

But, as she came near the Vulcan Shop, and saw the busy throng passing in and out, with no sign of a woman near it, she faltered and trembled, finally stopping short a block away and turning back to give up her design.

And just at that moment when she had determined to go back, who should come out of the works but John Armstrong himself, striding along full of business, and not seeing her till he almost ran over her.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REJECTED ADDRESS.

WHEN he did see her, however, he could not conceal his surprise. She had the advantage over him of being prepared for the meeting, for he started, blushed, stammered, and said, hurriedly:

"I beg your pardon. I did not see you at first. I never dreamed of your being in this part of the town."

Then Ella screwed up her courage to the effort and said, boldly:

"Mr. Armstrong, I wanted to see you. I am glad we met. I—I wanted to ask you, why you have never been to see us since that dreadful night?"

He had become calmer now.

"I did not come," he answered, quietly, "for two reasons. First, I have been out of a place through taking the side of the men in the strike. Second, your mother had shown a dislike to my presence which it was not for me to offend by intruding myself."

"But I did not share it," she said, impulsively. "My mother has her prejudices, and that man helps to excite them. You have only to come to remove them. My mother thinks—"

"I know. She told me herself. She thinks I hurt Stryker, when I—"

He stopped short. He could not say he had saved his life, but she cried:

"What? what? When you what?"

"When I—never mind. It is not for me to say what I did. If your mother wishes the particulars of the affair, let her write to my father. He was present, and saw it all."

"Then will you not come and explain?" she asked, wistfully. "I wish you would do it for my sake."

John felt a strange thrill.

"I would do a great deal for you," he said, simply; "a great deal. But there are some things a man cannot do. If you wish to restore me to your mother's friendship, write to my father at Painted Post. He can tell you all."

And with that John raised his hat and departed, never looking back, while Ella, her eyes full of tears of mortification, went back home saying to herself all the way:

"How proud he is. Yet I'm sure he loves me. But how shall I make mother see him with my eyes?"

That difficulty has been felt by other daughters many a time.

When Ella got home she locked herself up in her room and wrote a letter which she brought down and showed her mother before posting.

"There," she said, "I've made up my mind to find out the truth. I met Mr. Armstrong, and he refuses to call here as long as you entertain unworthy suspicions of him. He refuses even to explain. He refers me to his father, who saw all the affair, for an account of it. Have you any objection to my sending him this letter?"

The old lady hesitated.

"Not if you think me unjust—"

"I do, I do, I do," said Ella, vehemently. "You have condemned him unheard; have given him no chance to say a word. He is too proud to defend himself, and leaves it all to an eye-witness. Do you refuse to let me send this letter?"

The old lady was moved.

"No, my dear, I do not; but I think it would be better I should write. I can do it in better taste than you, as the widow of Sergeant Armstrong's colonel."

"And will you?" asked Ella, her face lighting up.

"I will. Let me see that letter."

Ella gave it to her, and her mother added a postscript and gave it back.

"There is nothing to be objected to. It is a lady's letter. You can send it. But at least do justice to Mr. Stryker, if it turns out we are mistaken. He has never directly accused Armstrong."

Ella smiled bitterly.

"Not directly. No. Well, I will go to the post-office station."

And she was off again, walking rapidly.

That evening, Mr. James Stryker, in the parlor, announced that he felt he could move out next day, and observed, looking at Ella:

"My absence may give more pleasure than pain to some people, though to me all the pain I have suffered is as nothing to that of going away."

Ella tossed her head and went on with her work, when her mother with a sly nod at James slipped out of the room and Stryker continued:

"Why do you hate me so, Miss Morton? Heaven knows I've no wish but to please you, and if you would only accept all I have in the world, I would devote the rest of my life to making you happy. I have already spoken to your mother, and she heartily approves of my suit. I am rich enough to give you luxury and ease; to take you and your mother from this poor locality and take you to Europe, anywhere, everywhere. I have sold out my business on purpose to be free to minister to your pleasure, and all I ask in return from you is that you would try to love me a little. Ella, won't you try?"

She looked up at him steadily.

"Did you ask my mother for me?"

"Of course I did, first; but she told me she could not force you—"

"She was right. We are not living in that Europe you admire so much."

"But which you would like to visit, and which you can visit at once, as my wife, if you consent."

"But I thought you were too weak to travel," she said, sneering slightly.

He colored as he replied:

"You saw that I exaggerated my weakness. I own it. But it was only to be near to you a little longer. I'm a perfect weak fool near you, Ella. I cannot leave you, I love you so."

She turned on him sharply as he tried to approach.

"Keep your distance. I don't love you, and you know it. I shall never forget our first meeting, never! You tried to insult a poor friendless girl and another man punished you for it."

"I own it. I deserved it," he said, with exaggerated humility; "but even then I loved you. I was only too bold. But I have reformed, repented—"

"Repented! You!"

Only two words, but accompanied by such a withering look that he saw she knew him thoroughly.

"Mr. Stryker," she said presently, with the coolest of voices, "I thank you for your offer, but decline it. If you will not take that for an answer, and change the subject, I shall leave the room."

He turned away, grinding his teeth, but took the hint and kept silence for a little while. At last he murmured with the air of a martyr:

"I did not expect to be insulted for paying you the highest compliment a man can pay, but I submit. The time may come when you may regret the harshness you have shown. I may have injured others; you never."

She went on working quietly, and he was emboldened to add:

"I never thought it before, but I see it is true what I have heard cynics say."

"And what is that?" she asked, when he stopped.

"Only that the most delicate women are those who most admire brawn and muscle, and look with most contempt on intellect."

She raised her eyes composedly.

"By which I am to understand that you consider yourself an intellectual paragon?"

"I did not say so. I hope I am not a fool, at least. But you admire the bruiser style, I suppose?"

Her eyes flashed.

"What do you mean, sir? You are rude."

"Oh, never mind," he answered, with a bitter smile. "I don't pretend to be a bruiser. I have, in fact, been well-beaten by some of your friends in that line, headed by your particular hero, the young blacksmith. I hope you'll be happy as his wife."

She had grown deadly pale as he spoke, and now sprung up from her chair.

"Since you have shown your true character at last," she said, cuttingly, "I cannot be blamed for leaving the room."

And she was sweeping to the door when her mother entered.

With all the eagerness of an insulted girl she seized on the opportunity.

"Mother," she cried, "this person has just insulted me grossly. Shall I leave the house or will you order him out?"

The old lady was astounded.

"What's the matter, Ella? What has happened, my child?" she faltered. "Do you forget Mr. Stryker is our guest?"

"He has forgotten it, mother!" she cried, panting. "He has insulted me grossly. Will you tell him to go or not?"

"But what has he said?" asked the old lady, piteously.

Stryker seized the opportunity.

"I offered Miss Morton all I had to offer, madam," he said, mournfully. "She seems to look on that offer as an insult. I will not oppress her with my presence, but will bid you good-by. I had no intention to insult any one, Heaven knows. If the warmth of my love has led me to speak plainly of one who, I fear has abused your and her confidence, I can wait for time to justify me. Farewell, Mrs. Morton. God bless you for your kindness to me."

And with a very well simulated sob, he marched out of the house, leaving Mrs. Morton in a state of mingled anger and bewilderment, which broke out a moment later to her daughter.

"Well, Ella, I must say that I never thought a daughter of mine would drive a guest of mine into the street like that. You have thrown away the best match you'll ever have the chance to make. Insulted you! Nonsense. You're a romantic little fool, and I'm ashamed of you. Don't say a word."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LETTER.

POOR Ella! She had an unhappy time of it that night and the next day. Her mother cut short her explanations; would not see that she had any cause to complain; praised Stryker to the skies as one of the nicest young men she had ever met, and the end of it was mother and daughter separated on bad terms with each other, Ella rebelling against injustice, Mrs. Morton calling her a romantic, love-sick girl, who would bitterly regret what she had done when it was too late.

The coldness lasted over Sunday, and poor Ella went to school with a headache, coming back worse, while everything seemed to go wrong in the quiet little house in Ashley street.

Mrs. Morton had ended by setting her heart on the match Ella had rejected, and seemed to take a deeper dislike to Armstrong every moment that the quarrel lasted.

As for Ella, she was miserable at her mother's anger, and her own faded away till she began to wish the thing had never happened, and was thinking seriously of trying to compromise, when, on Tuesday afternoon, the bell rung, and the postman delivered a letter to her mother, marked "Painted Post."

This letter she brought in and gave to her mother, palpitating.

The old lady glanced at it and put it in her pocket with an air of severity that completely broke down Ella's nerves.

The girl burst into tears, left the room, and was found, an hour later, by her mother, lying on her bed in a darkened room, still sobbing.

Then the old lady came and sat down by the bed, looking awkward; and a long silence ensued.

Ella was watching her mother, half-frightened, half-hopeful; the old lady was trying to make up her mind to speak. At last she said:

"Ella."

"Yes, mother."

The faintest of voices. The tone of a martyr, yet Ella was acting. The best of women cannot help acting, and Ella knew her triumph was coming, so she pretended to be worse than she was.

"Ella," resumed the old lady, melting at the sight of her daughter's suffering, "we have quarreled long enough. Let's make up, child. I was angry and jealous. Yes, child, I admit it. I'm jealous of this young man you love so much better than me. I cannot get to like him. I wish you'd taken Mr. Stryker. He had promised never to separate us."

Ella opened her eyes.

"Had he, mother? But I didn't love him."

"You'd have learned to, after awhile. But it's no use thinking of it now. I see you're crazy after the other, and I've just read his father's letter."

"What does it say?" asked Ella, faintly.

She did not dare to show interest in it, for fear of rousing her mother's jealousy again. The old lady hesitated, and at last drew it out.

"I'll read it to you, child."

Then she read aloud:

"HONORED MADAM:—

"In regards to the questions you writ me, I take my pen in hand to let you know this.

"John and me was passing your house that night, when we heard a shot, and a young man came running by us with a pistol, chased by a gang of loafers. He lost his head, and they had him cornered on the dock and was a-giving it to him hot, when John and me went in and fou't them till they run. John got a stab in the arm as he ain't well of yet, but I was not hurt, to speak of. I went for the police ambulance, and John took the man to your house. I asked the doctor next day if he was hurt bad, and he told me not so bad as he made out. He thought he was putting on a good deal. That is all I know.

"Yours to command,

"JOHN ARMSTRONG."

Ella lay still and watched her mother. She knew better than to say, "What did I tell you?"

Presently the old lady observed, with a slight sigh:

"I shall have to write to him, I suppose, and ask him to call."

Ella made no answer but turned her head to hide the smile she could not repress.

"Don't you think I ought to, Ella?" her mother asked, wistfully.

"That is for you to judge, mother," was the faint reply, almost in a whisper.

The old lady tapped her foot on the floor.

"I apprehended that fact, my daughter. I asked what you thought?"

"It is not my business to advise my mother," said Ella, still more faintly. "I am not well. I have a terrible headache. Please don't ask me."

"Hum! Well, then, I suppose I'd better not write. After all, he might not come, and I don't care to humiliate myself unnecessarily."

Ella watched her mother out of her half-closed eyelids.

"No, he might not come," added the old lady. "I'd better not write."

She nodded her head angrily, and Ella in the faintest of voices whispered:

"There's no harm in trying."

A slight smile crossed the old lady's thin face, as she retorted:

"Oh, you think so, do you? Do you think he would come if I asked him?"

"I think so, mother. He would be bound to obey a lady's wishes."

"Yes. I see. Well—I'll write."

And the old lady suddenly hugged her daughter in a way that showed she had not lost all the impetuosity Ella had inherited from her, and swept out of the room.

As she went out Ella listened intently and heard her mother sob slightly.

"She's sorry for what she's done," said the girl to herself. "Poor mother! I wonder if I shall ever feel that way?"

And it was remarkable with what speed Ella's headache vanished.

Her mother, coming down a little later, found her in the parlor, dressed and beaming with health, while Kitty, the girl, was in the area-way, hailing some one down the street, and Ella was watching the proceeding with such interest that she did not hear her mother's entrance till the old lady spoke rather sharply:

"What's this, Ella?"

Ella turned with a charming smile.

"Only Kitty is calling up a messenger boy, mamma. You know they take letters so quickly and bring an answer."

The old lady was taken aback. She looked sternly at Ella, but could not keep her countenance, and finally handed her a letter, saying:

"There, there, goosie. Well, of all—girls are getting dreadful nowadays."

"And mothers charming," retorted Ella, with a gladsome hug, when she flew off to deliver the letter and promised the messenger boy a quarter extra if he'd "run every step of the way."

Need it be said that the astute youth set off at the top of his speed till he had turned the corner, when he took a leisurely pace and finally arrived at the Vulcan Works, where he delivered his missive to Armstrong.

The young man looked at it.

"Mrs. Morton's compliments to Mr. Armstrong, and hopes he will call at his earliest convenience at 143 Ashley street."

John's face lighted up, and he made the heart of that messenger boy leap like a spring lamb, as he handed him a big trade dollar, and said:

"Take that. How fast can you get back to Ashley street?"

"Ten minutes, sir."

"Very good. Here's your answer."

He scribbled it hastily:

"Mr. Armstrong will do himself the pleasure of calling this evening at 8 P. M."

"Now run, and I'll give you a second dollar if you bring a receipt in twenty minutes."

The grass did not grow under that boy's feet, you may be sure. He came breathless up to Ella, who opened the door in a way that showed she had been waiting, and he panted out:

"Here 'tis, miss. Sign the book, please. Gent said he'd give me a dollar if I was back in twenty minutes."

Ella signed her own name, and ran off with the note, which she kissed as soon as she was in the passage.

The boy ran back all the way, handed the book to the manager of the Vulcan Works, and was amazed to see him kiss the place where Ella had signed, though not a grin crossed the youthful features of the emissary. He took his dollar stoically, and it was not till he got outside that he gave vent to his feelings by saying audibly:

"Golly! ain't it bully to get in with a pair of mashes! Don't count money no more nor dirt. I'll keep an eye on that gal, I will. She's worth money to me."

All the rest of that afternoon John was restless, and at his boarding-house he hardly ate any supper.

As soon as he could in decency, he dressed with unusual care, and started out for Ashley street, humming softly to himself some lines he had happened to read that very day, in a collection of poetry on the parlor table of his boarding-house.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all."

"I'll do it," he said to himself, as he turned into Ashley street. "I might never have done it, if the mother had not treated me so shabbily. Now I'll do it. I'll try my fate to-night and win or lose it all."

And as he said the last words he saw the form of Ella Morton at the parlor window of No. 143.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PITCHED BATTLE.

THE meeting, that evening, between John Armstrong and Mrs. Morton was a peculiar one.

The old lady came into the parlor to find her daughter and John sitting on opposite sides of the room; Ella, with a puzzled, embarrassed look on her face, examining the pattern of the carpet, while Armstrong sat by the window, looking partly out, and talking in the most indifferent way about the weather.

Kitty had opened the door for him, and carried a formal message to Mrs. Morton that "Mr. Armstrong requested the pleasure of seeing her."

When she came down-stairs and entered the room John rose quietly, drew himself up like a soldier on parade, and bowed with great politeness, but equal coldness, as the old lady said:

"I am really very glad to see you, Mr. Armstrong. Where have you been all this time?"

She tried to speak easily, this proud old lady, who began to see she had been wrong, but hated to acknowledge it; yet her words ended in a nervous little laugh, and she could not help feeling embarrassed before the man she had called a "clown."

And the clown, what did he say?

"I received your note, madam," he answered, with a grave bow, "and am here to wait your commands."

As he spoke, he offered her a chair as calmly as if he had been raised in some court in Europe, and it was the old lady who began to feel a humiliating sense of inferiority in the contest of wits impending.

She sat down, however, remarking:

"Oh, I can hardly say I have any commands for you. I thought it rather strange that you kept away from us so long—"

She hesitated and actually broke down; when John, with a slight smile that made Mrs. Morton feel exasperated all over, answered:

"I have had several reasons for not calling, madam, the last of which was removed by your note, though I fancied, from its purport, that you had something to say to me beyond the ordinary courtesies of a short acquaintance."

Ella had been sitting at one end of a sofa, looking half-puzzled, half-afraid, when she heard this, and began to tremble all over.

This young man was actually daring her mother to an encounter, and she knew the old lady's temper too well to doubt the challenge would be accepted. Mrs. Morton's dark eyes

flashed a glance over the form of John Armstrong, and then she turned round on Ella.

"My daughter," she said, quietly, "will you oblige me by seeing if I did not leave my letter from Mr. Armstrong's father somewhere in my room. I think I did."

Ella rose palpitating. She felt that there was a quarrel in the air, with which she dared not interfere, between two people whom she dearly loved, in which one of them must be wrong; and she felt frightened to find that she was, in her heart siding against her mother, who actually was sending her out of the room.

She went out silently; and, as soon as the door closed, the old lady dashed at Armstrong, beginning the battle at once with the privilege of her sex, and hoping to rout the young man by moving on his works with a rush.

"Now, sir," she said, sharply, "perhaps you will explain the singular tone you have adopted toward me, who have only had the pleasure of seeing you twice before in my life. I can excuse a great deal to your lack of breeding on account of your disadvantages of education, but when you think that I could have anything to say to you beyond the ordinary words of a chance acquaintance, you are much mistaken. Your father is a worthy and honest person, who served under my husband's orders; and I had a kindly feeling for you as his son, as I have for the children of all my husband's old soldiers. That is all, sir. I wish to treat you kindly still, but you must not imagine that I write notes for any purpose but that expressed on their face. I excuse your mistake on account of your lack of acquaintance with the usages of the society in which I was born, but if you wish to remain on visiting terms at this house, the mistake must not be repeated."

And Mrs. Morton fanned her flushed cheek and looked steadily at the wall, with all the virtuous anger of a woman who knows she is in the wrong, but is determined to fight it out.

As for John, he kept his eyes on her face, though she would not meet his glance, all the time she was speaking, with a gravity that nothing could disturb.

When she had finished, he watched her in perfect silence, till she turned her eyes defiantly on him, when he fixed her at last with his grave look, as he replied:

"I thank you, madam, for your kind lesson on courtesy. I own that I was laboring under a grievous mistake. I thought you had seen me three times instead of twice. That was all."

Now he had gained her glance he kept it, and she answered sharply:

"Two or three; what difference does it make? Does that give you a title to ask anything from me, but distant acquaintanceship?"

John smiled slightly.

"On each occasion, madam, you have done me the favor to be extremely frank with me. On the last you accused me openly of a murderous assault on a man whose life I had just saved."

"Oh, no, no, no, you mistake," she interrupted; "you are entirely mistaken. I did not mean—"

She could not proceed under the quiet, steady gaze of John, who waited till she had stopped entirely, when he went on, with slow, deliberate emphasis:

"I beg your pardon. Your last words to me, standing on your own doorstep, were these: '*I will do my best to save this young man from the consequences of your ungoverned temper.*' Then you shut the door on me. The young man in question was Mr. James Stryker, whom you imagined I had assaulted, and who was, in fact, nearly killed on that same night. I was foolish enough to think, madam, that, having found out, as I trust you have before this, the mistake you made, you had sent for me to acknowledge it and make reparation therefor. I am sorry to see I was mistaken, and as I have no right to dictate to you any line of conduct, in my ignorance of the usages of the society, to which, as you say, you were born, though I did not have that good fortune, I will bid you good-evening."

And this peculiar young man rose up like a tower before the old lady, made her a profound bow, and was walking quietly to the door, when Mrs. Morton said, in a low voice:

"Stop, stop, if you please."

John obeyed and came back, when he stood before her, hat in hand, looking pale and determined, his eyes fixed on the old lady's face in stern gravity.

She gave him one swift glance, and her eyes fell on the floor, when she began to pick her fan to pieces in a nervous manner startlingly like her daughter, as she said—stammeringly:

"I suppose—you think—I ought to—make you—an—apology."

"In my ignorance of the usages of the society in which you were born, madam, I cannot ask anything from you of any sort. Being myself only a mechanic, when I find that I have, unintentionally, wronged another person, I feel that, until I have redressed the wrong, I am below the person I have injured. I am not aware whether that rule prevails in the society in which you were born."

His tones were icily cold, and he laid not the least emphasis on the words to imply any sar-

castic intent; nevertheless the old lady shivered and murmured:

"You're too hard—too hard. I'm sorry—I didn't mean—"

And just at this juncture the parlor door opened, and Ella walked in to her mother's side, saying quietly:

"I could not find the letter, mother— Why, what's the matter?"

For her mother had risen and came tottering toward her, clutching her arm as if fearing to fall, while John remained standing, hat in hand, and the expression on his face showed that the quarrel she had dreaded was in full progress.

"The matter is, Miss Morton," he said, in the same stern, icy way, "that I am about to bid you all good-evening. A mechanic, I find, in your mother's eyes, has no pretensions to be treated other than as one below the society in which you have been born. I bid you good-evening and farewell."

For the first time in his life, John was angry with a woman, and he had his hand on the knob of the door to leave the house forever, when Mrs. Morton suddenly cried out:

"Mr. Armstrong, don't—for heaven's sake—don't be too hard on an old woman like me. I was wrong. I own it. But you have your triumph."

"Not yet, madam," said John, in a very low voice. As he spoke he came back and looked wistfully into her eyes. "I wish for no triumph over you. But things have gone so far between us now that I can never visit your house again, but on one footing."

"And what is that?" she asked, clutching her daughter's arm involuntarily, while Ella trembled violently.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEST STEP OF ALL.

JOHN was by no means calm himself now. The old lady's last words had been like balm to his heart, cut by her bitter sneers at the beginning of the interview; but he felt that a heavier battle still was before him, and one on which his whole happiness had come to depend.

In his modesty he had been perfectly blind to the possibility that Ella might ever come to love him, until the day she had met him in the street, when a glimpse of the marvelous truth had begun to dawn on him, to return again and again, in spite of his rejection.

The cutting words of the old lady, when she had tried to ride over him at the beginning of their interview, had for the first time in his life fully aroused him. Failing to crush him down, they had stung him to the quick and awakened conscious dignity and resentment.

"I can never visit at your house again, but on one footing," he had said, and the old lady had asked:

"What is that?"

"To explain it, madam," he returned in the quietest of tones, "I will ask permission to put down my hat, and that you will take your seat with your daughter. On your answer depends the issue whether I shall ever enter these doors again."

He motioned them to the sofa, and they sat down, Ella clinging to her mother now, on the defensive against—she knew not what—both looking up at this singular young man who stood before them, exceedingly pale, but with an expression on his face Mrs. Morton had never seen there before, and under which she actually quailed.

John was bitterly hurt and angry at last, and his hand trembled as he put down his hat on the table. He took no seat, but stood looking down into Mrs. Morton's eyes, his own flaming with honest anger as he said:

"Mrs. Morton, two years ago, as you are well aware, I paid a visit to your house at your own request. I should not have dared intrude, even then, on any less excuse. Once again, I asked permission to call with my father, and was received by you in a manner that plainly showed your dislike to me—for what cause I know not—"

The old lady put up her hand in a deprecating way.

"Not dislike. Do not say that."

"Distrust then, madam, if you wish. It is true that I am a mechanic, but for all that I have learned some of the usages of that society to which, as you have said this evening, I was not born—"

She interrupted him again.

"No, I did not go so far as that."

"Perhaps not, madam, in words, but the implication was unmistakable. Permit me to proceed I beg. These may be the last words I shall ever say to you, in this house."

The old lady drew herself up.

"Proceed, sir," she said, coldly. "I submit to your rebuke."

John hesitated a moment; but he was too much in earnest to be called off on side issues, and he knew Mrs. Morton was trying to divert his attention by putting him in the wrong. He went on:

"The third time I called at your house, the visit was forced on me by events over which I had no control. A man was nearly killed close

to your door, and, knowing you as the widow of a brave officer, as well as having some experience in cases of severe injury, I ventured a claim on your humanity. The injured man was your friend, my rival—"

"Rival!" echoed Mrs. Morton, affecting astonishment. "In what?"

"In business, in study, in love, and in aspiring to the hand of a lady I honor and love above any woman in this world, madam," was the bold answer. "I told you that these might be the last words I might ever say to you. I hope to make them so plain as to leave no doubt of the footing on which alone I can ever again enter this house. I thought that, in a case of such gravity, my motives might excuse a brief intrusion. The result we both know. For the mistake under which you labored I forgive you freely; though it hurt me very bitterly, coming from you. The words you then said prevented me from any further intercourse with any member of your family, without your own express permission. To-night, you have shown me plainly, with a frankness for which I thank you, the cause of your too evident dislike. I was not born in the society in which you moved in your early years. In other words, I am your inferior socially, in this country where we are all supposed to be free and equal, one with the other. I ask you, madam, now, once for all, whether such is your deliberate opinion?"

He ceased and looked down at her, pale to the lips.

Ella, still paler, had clasped her hands and was gazing anxiously at her mother, awaiting her answer.

Mrs. Morton looked up, and her voice trembled slightly as she replied:

"I think no such thing, Mr. Armstrong. I respect you highly."

"Then, madam," he said, still keeping his eyes on hers, "do you think that it was either just or considerate to taunt me with disadvantages under which I alone suffer?"

"It was not," said the old lady, slowly. "I am sorry I said it. I did not mean it; but I am apt to be carried away by my nervous temperament. You know I am an invalid, John."

Had a thunderbolt fallen it would hardly have astonished him more than to hear her call him "John."

The old lady's tones were broken and appealing, and they melted him at once. He even felt ashamed of his own plain talk, and cast a look at Ella, when, to his intense amazement, he saw that the girl's face was all lighted up with joy, and that she gave him a look that actually encouraged him to go on as plain as looks could speak.

What was it taught John Armstrong the meaning of that look? Hard to say. Ella was almost the only woman with whom he had ever exchanged three words of more than passing import.

With a hardihood that surprised himself, he said, distinctly:

"Then, Mrs. Morton, I forgive you all you have said, on one condition."

She looked up piteously.

"What is it, John? Oh, don't take her away from me, my dear boy."

John could not stand that. The cry of a woman in distress made him as weak as a baby. He gave a deep sob, and turned away to the table, saying:

"I know I'm not good enough for her; but—well, good-by. I'll always love you for her sake, though you can't let her go from you. Good-by."

And he was actually going, this simple-hearted fellow, in his innocence, with all his knowledge, when Ella gently raised up her mother and led her across the room, where the old lady laid her hand on the young man's arm, and said, coaxingly:

"Don't mind me, John. Don't mind me. I am a poor, jealous old woman, and I'm her mother."

John turned round, his eyes full of tears, as he said, simply:

"Ay, I forgot. You see I never had a mother to remember. I wish—oh, how I wish you would be my mother! I'd try hard to please you, if you wouldn't hate me too much."

And then the old lady broke down, too; for she put both hands on his shoulders, and said brokenly:

"Oh, John, you're a noble, noble man, and you've won my heart at last. I will try to be a mother to you."

But he stopped still at the door.

"Will you give her to me freely?" he asked.

"Will you let me ask her before you? I've no right to ask a daughter to disobey her mother."

The old lady smiled faintly.

"Yes, John, you can ask her."

Then he turned to Ella very quietly.

"Miss Ella," he said, with a certain honest gravity that was almost pathetic, "I was only a poor mechanic when I first saw you, and in my humble way I loved you then. For love of you I studied hard to educate myself. For love of you I learned to do things I never dreamed I could do. I owe to you all I am. You made me. Had I never seen you, I should

still be plain, illiterate John Armstrong, mechanic. You have shown me a higher life, in which I have learned to love you as a lady should be loved. I know I am not worthy of you yet, but I hope some day to make you proud of me. Will you—will you—marry—me?"

His voice broke at the last words, for he felt his heart beating like a trip-hammer at the risk he ran.

But the lines kept running in his head:

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small.
Who fears to put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all."

And Ella. What did she say?

"Yes, John, I will. Why, I'm proud of you already, and so is my mother. Only—you must promise not to part us."

And that was the quiet, commonplace way in which John Armstrong won his little wife; for married they were, a month later.

And they had a quiet little trip, on which Mrs. Morton did not accompany them, and when they came back, they settled down in the little house at 143 Ashley street, where let us leave them for the present. When next we come on John it will be amid more stirring scenes, for he was not one of those men who believe marriage to be the end of interest in a man's life, on the contrary, as he said to his wife:

"I feel as if I were just beginning to live in real earnest."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PROPOSITION.

JOHN ARMSTRONG, manager of the Vulcan Iron Works, with a salary of five thousand dollars a year, worked even harder after his marriage, than did plain John Armstrong, mechanic, when he riveted boilers.

True, his labor was no longer with the hands; but he attended to his headwork, as he had to the other, with his whole soul and mind, early and late.

And under his management the shop went on smoothly; work was turned out with unexampled rapidity, and John knew, from the relative cost of what he bought and sold, that the works must be making a handsome profit, when one day President Handy, who had been absent, traveling on unexplained business, came back to the office, and said, carelessly:

"Ah, by the by, John, there is to be a meeting of the stockholders next Monday, and I want to look over the books."

John looked at him, doubtfully.

"The clerks are busy making out the quarterly statement, Mr. Handy. If you are in a hurry, I can have it ready for you to-morrow."

"I don't want the statement, man. I want to see the books myself," returned Handy, irritably. "I suppose I have a right to look at them, as the President of the Company?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the young manager, coldly. "They are open to your inspection at all times. Where will you have them brought to you?"

"In my own room," said Handy, very shortly; "and at once."

Then he went to his inner apartment, leaving John surprised at the unusual irritability of a man who had always appeared to be his friend.

He went round to the clerks and ordered them to take in their books to the president's room, but there was something, to him, so strange in the request that he told each clerk, privately, to take notes of the last entry on each book before they went in, bringing the report to him.

The request made them stare; but they complied with it, and John saw the books go into Handy's room, when the clerks came out one by one, with smiling faces, and told him that Mr. Handy had given them all a holiday till next day.

This time John felt sure that something was wrong, but he went on with his own work, alone, till late in the afternoon, when Handy came out of the inner room, looking tired and anxious, with a strange, furtive expression in his eyes.

"By Jove," he said, forcing a laugh. "It's hard work going over so much at a time. Have a cigar, John?"

"Thank you, I never smoke," was John's reply, as Handy lit his own cigar and began to smoke vehemently, pacing the room, and casting an occasional glance at the young manager, who pretended not to see him, but went on writing.

At last Handy stopped and said:

"Ah, by the by, John, I see you make a pretty good showing on the books."

"I hope so, sir," was the quiet reply. "I judged it my duty to the company to help it in making money."

Handy laughed in a nervous way.

"Yes, I see. Why, you'll be able to declare a dividend, won't you?"

John looked at him steadily.

"Certainly, sir, at least four per cent."

The answer, for some unexplained reason, appeared to irritate Handy; for he wheeled around

with a frown and strode to the door, where he stood tapping irritably on the glass.

Presently he turned round, came to John's side, sat down, and said to him in a coaxing way:

"See here, John, I've always been a friend of yours, haven't I? I've raised you from a laborer to what you are, haven't I?"

John bowed his head gravely.

"You have been kind to me, Mr. Handy. I have never denied it."

"Then you ought to be willing to do me a favor, John."

"I hope so, sir, if it be not inconsistent with my duty to the company."

"Oh, hang the company, John. Vulpin and I are the company. We control a majority of the stock."

"Pardon me," returned John, quietly, "I have ascertained that a clear majority of the shares are held by outside parties in small lots. At least, as you are aware, the books show it."

"Hang the books. Vulpin is secretary, and he will only notify the men he can depend upon. Armstrong, I tell you what it is: this concern can't afford to declare a dividend this quarter. Do you understand?"

John turned and looked at him.

"No, I do not. Please explain."

"Well, Vulpin and I have both been selling short and we've got to have time to cover."

"But what have the private dealings of yourself and Mr. Vulpin in the stock market to do with my duty to the Vulcan Company, sir? I was made manager to protect the interests of the stockholders. By economy in buying and selling, I have overcome the increase in cost since giving the advanced wages, and if I am able to show a dividend in cash, it is my duty to do it."

He spoke so calmly and coolly that Handy did not interrupt him.

When he had finished, the other said:

"You forget. Your duty as manager is only to run the works. Vulpin and I are the men to show dividends."

"You can only show what is on the books," answered John, sharply, "unless you propose to make a false sheet."

Handy bit his lips and smiled with a sneering expression.

"There's no need of anything of the sort. If there were, I should do it without asking your help. I have a proposition to make to you."

John made figures on the edge of his paper with a pen, saying:

"I presumed as much."

"Yes, well, you see, in fact—"

Here Handy stopped and smoked a little before he resumed:

"You're too confounded economical, altogether. It don't pay just now. It would if Vulpin and I owned all the stock; but we don't. It's necessary for us to freeze out the small holders to accomplish our ends."

"And what are they?"

"To own the company out and out. You see there are seventy or eighty of these small holders, and no man in the world could get them to combine together. As long as they get dividends they'll hold on to their little bundles of shares. Stop the dividends and make a call, and they'll be glad to sell out."

"Well?" said John, as Handy stopped.

"Well?"

The president drew a long breath. "Well, the long and short of the matter is this. I'm going to freeze 'em out anyhow, and I give you your choice of two things. Take a trip to Europe, and when you come back you'll have a quarter interest in the stock, which will be held by Vulpin, me and you. After that, the more economical you are the better for us all."

John turned round to face him.

"And I am to gain all this by a trip to Europe? Who is to manage while I am away, and what excuse can I make for going?"

"I'll attend to that. I'll send you over to buy steel."

"We've all we need."

"I don't think so, and I'm president."

"Very well, sir. Sign the order, that I may hold it as an authority, and I will go; but it must be official."

Handy bit his lips.

"It's not convenient to do it. I give you the verbal order."

"You must be aware that I cannot take any such authority. I hold my position as manager, as you are also aware, by a vote of the board, and only the official order of the president, countersigned by the secretary, can justify me in leaving my post at such a time to buy needless stock."

Handy looked at him frowningly.

"So you refuse to go to England?"

"Certainly, except on a positive order, of which you must take the responsibility officially. You mentioned an alternative to me. What is it?"

Handy puffed at his cigar slowly.

"I don't wish to name it, unless you are determined to fight me."

"Fight you? Such an idea is absurd. Why should I fight you?"

"You are doing it now. I tell you it is absolutely necessary that there should be no dividend this quarter. I suggest to you a way which you can escape any possible blame at our meeting. I want you to go to England to buy a million's worth of steel. The trip will be pleasant. I will arrange the rest. Your salary can be trebled when we three own all the works. All I want you to do is to shut your eyes and go to Europe. Your fortune will be made. Yet you refuse. You fight me. Now then for the alternative."

"Yes; what is it?"

"If you fight me, Vulpin and I will crush you. Mark that. I give you till to-morrow night to consider my proposition—"

"Stop!" suddenly said John, sharply. "As president you've said enough. You want me to go away, so that, in my absence, you and Vulpin may make a false statement and cheat the other stockholders. You dare not sign an order for me to spend all the profits in buying needless stock. You cannot do this without my help, and now you threaten me. I have only one word to say to you—"

He led Handy to the door and pointed to the street.

"Go!" he thundered.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OLD ENEMY.

THE works were emptying of men as John led Handy to the door and pointed the way out. The grip of his hand on the other's arm was too menacing to be disregarded, and Handy knew John's prowess of old.

He went away with a bitter scowl on his face, while the young manager locked the door, went into the room where Handy had been examining the books, and found them all lying on the table in confusion.

He knew that it was war to the knife now, between him and Handy, so he carefully examined all the books to see if any alterations had been made, by comparing them with the notes given him by the clerks of the last entries.

Everything was all right, and he took them to the great safe and put them in, when he suddenly remembered that the combination of the lock was one known to three persons, himself, Vulpin and Handy.

"If either of them wants to alter the books," he thought, "they can do it at night as well as in the day. I will alter the combination. If I must fight, I will fight to win."

So saying, he altered the combination to one entirely different, and locked the safe; when he went home feeling much easier in his mind. No one could trip him up now.

His wife noticed his abstraction in the evening, and asked him the cause of it, but he laughed it off and proposed to enliven the time by going to the play; a proposition gladly accepted.

So John and Ella went to Wallack's and took seats in the orchestra, where they enjoyed the drama with all the pleasure of people who have not been spoiled by too much dissipation, till, in one of the interludes Ella whispered:

"Oh, John, look! In the box."

He looked up to one of the stage boxes, and saw a very beautiful woman whose dress seemed to be hung onto her bare shoulders by two narrow gold straps, while the bold, languid stare with which she surveyed the house showed that if she had ever had any modesty she had conquered it long ago. And behind this woman, in the midst of a group of similar girls and some young men, stood James Stryker, in full evening dress, his shirt-front showing a diamond stud that glinted all over the house like a star, while any one might see, with half an eye, that James was pretty drunk. He stood staring solemnly down into the pit, with an owl's gravity that would have been comical but for the extreme pallor of his face; and Ella said:

"I saw in the paper he had just come back from Europe, and had been married to some French countess. I wonder if that is his wife?"

John shook his head.

"Never mind, dear. Don't look at him. A man ought to know better than to do such things."

As soon as the play was over, he and his wife hurried into the lobby to catch a street-car, when, much to John's surprise and annoyance, he ran on Stryker in the crowd, with the bold-looking woman on his arm, and the young man cried out thickly:

"Wh' Armstrong, d'lighted, sure, 'low me Madame la Comtesse de Millefleurs, Misser Armstrong—eh, bless ma soul—Missis too! Un-expect' pleasure 'mshure."

And he nodded and grinned effusively at Ella, who clung close under her big husband's arm, as John, without deigning to notice the drunken advances of the other, passed sternly on, pushing the maudlin Stryker to one side, and thought they were well rid of him, as he at last boarded a car.

To his amazement they were not; for, about three blocks further on, a carriage came driving past at a furious rate of speed, and ran into their car as they turned a corner, the pole smashing the glass so close to Armstrong's

head that only a lucky stoop saved him from being killed.

Of course there was a rush in a moment, with women screaming and men swearing, in the midst of which the carriage was backed and turned away, when the driver, whipping his horses savagely, drove off as fast as he had come.

"That man must have been staving blind drunk," remarked the conductor, ruefully, as he surveyed the ruined glass. "It wasn't a hack, neither. Looked like a man in livery on the box. Don't be scared, ladies. It's all over. Four dollars out of the company's pocket. Go on, Tom."

And the car rolled on, when Ella, in a tone of horror, whispered to John:

"Did you hear the voice, John?"

"No, darling. I have an idea who it was, however. It was Stryker's carriage."

Ella clung closer to him.

"He was on the box," she whispered. "I heard him shout: 'Better luck next time, old Armstrong. I'll beat you yet.'"

"Are you sure?" asked Armstrong.

"Certain. You know how he hates you, of course."

"I suppose he does. Well, he can't hurt me, can he? I can arrest him for this escapade but I don't care to. He can never hurt me without greater danger to himself of all people."

But after they had got home and John had had time to think over the affair, he began to feel that he could not afford to have any more enemies than he had already. He had heard that Stryker had sold out all his interest to the iron works founded by the original Stryker, had made a great splurge in Europe as a millionaire, and had become known on Wall street as a stock operator, all within a few months of Armstrong's marriage to Ella.

Now for the first time the Vulcan Company shares were beginning to be quoted in the stock market, and John knew that his own future was in imminent peril on account of stock speculations in those very shares. Suppose that Stryker should join Handy with his load of ready cash, to obtain control of the board, what could he not do?

The drunken revelation of his hatred of Armstrong showed the latter that Stryker's smooth professions of friendship were all assumed.

"Drunken men tell the truth," he said to himself, "and I must look out for myself. I must depend on the outside stockholders and justice. If Stryker meets Handy and the two combine I shall be ruined at once."

And that very night he wrote off notes to all the stockholders, warning them that if they did not wish their property seriously depreciated they should call at the office at once and hold a meeting.

The writing these notes even with the assistance of a copying machine took him the greater part of the night, and he felt weary and unrefreshed next morning when he went to the works and found all the clerks at their posts looking puzzled and surprised at not being able to get at the books, which were kept in an outer department of the safe opened by a time-lock, which John had thrown out of gear.

He affected to notice nothing, and gave out the books, when business was resumed as usual, and nothing occurred to mar the serenity of everything till eleven o'clock, when Mr. Handy walked into the room, smoking a cigar, and closely followed by Mr. Vulpin, whose foxy face wore its usual stealthy and half-apologetic smile.

John rose and bowed formally, when Vulpin caressingly beckoned him to the inner room, calling out:

"Can't do anything without you, my dear fellow. Can't indeed. Come in."

And John, as in duty bound, followed the pair into the president's room, watching them all the way.

He noticed that Handy avoided his glance and looked cold and angry, at which he could not wonder, after the way in which they had parted; but Vulpin, on the other hand, overflowed with smiles and shrugs, insisting on John's taking a seat, while he closed the door carefully to prevent intrusion.

Then he came and sat down by the young manager in his most coaxing way, while Handy sat apart.

"Look here, Armstrong," he began, "Handy tells me you had a little misunderstanding yesterday, and I told him I was sure it was only that, and no more. He has a hot temper, and so have you; that's all. Now, I know you are not the man to stand in your own light, when a clear majority of the stockholders wish you to adopt a certain course, are you?"

John smiled.

"I hope not, Mr. Vulpin."

"I told Handy so, I told him so," returned Vulpin, with an air of relief. "Here, Handy, I told you that Mr. Armstrong would listen to reason. Of course he will."

Handy turned his head and scowled.

"Then why has he refused to obey my orders? I've a good mind to order his dismissal at once for insubordination."

"Now, now, Handy, don't be so violent," in-

terrupted the other, soothingly. "I tell you our friend's scruples do him honor, but there is a misunderstanding; that is all. We have no intention to defraud any one at all, but it is necessary that the clashing interests of these small holders should be consolidated, and that cannot be done while we, who do all the work, earn money for others."

He turned round on Armstrong as he said this with the most coaxing smile.

"We'll give you that written order," he said, "if you'll take the steamer that goes to-morrow at seven in the morning. Mr. Handy will manage the works while you are away. If you refuse that, we take the responsibility of dismissing you at once, and demand the key of the safe."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STRUGGLE.

VULPIN had the same crafty look as ever when he uttered his last threat, but there was a slight smile of triumph on his face, that showed he knew his power.

John saw that the fight had come at last, so he observed, quietly:

"I have already told Mr. Handy that, if he and you sign the order for me to go to Europe to buy steel for the company my duty compels me to go."

"Very well, that's all we want," said Vulpin, eagerly. "Here's the order in my pocket. Will you really go?"

"Certainly, if the order is explicit."

Handy turned toward him—he had kept his shoulder to him so far—and looked relieved, saying:

"That's more like, John. A good deal more. Give him the order, Vulpin."

Mr. Vulpin took out his pocket-book, and handed to John an order, which, on its face, was regular, directing him to proceed to Europe at once on business for the Vulcan Company, to procure a hundred thousand tons of Bessemer steel rail, for a contract into which the company had entered.

John looked it all over carefully, and then said:

"This order is all regular. I shall have to obey it, I suppose."

"Very well," said Handy, eagerly, "give me the safe-key at once, and I'll take charge. You can take a check for a quarter's salary in advance before you go, you know. I'm glad you've listened to reason at last. We don't want to be hard on you, Armstrong; but your Quixotic scruples are too much for us."

John rose up and folded the order in his pocket.

"You wish me, then, to give up my duty as manager at once?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, it's for the best, John. We have a good deal to do—"

Here they were interrupted by a noise in the outer office, several men speaking loudly, and steps were heard coming to the door.

"I tell you," some one shouted, "I'm a stockholder, and I've a right in there. Stop me if you dare. Come on, gentlemen, this is the way."

Then the door was flung open, and a crowd of excited persons entered the room, headed by a short, stout, bald-headed gentleman, who called out:

"Ah, here they are, here they are at last. Now, gentlemen, perhaps you'll tell me what this means? You, Mr. Handy, I mean, and you, Mr. Vulpin. What does this mean, sir?"

He waved a paper before them. John, not knowing what was coming, was watching everything with intense interest. He saw Handy's face assume the hard, defiant expression he had seen it wear during the strike, while Vulpin wore his usual caressing smile, but had turned quite pale as if he dreaded physical violence.

"You want to know what that is?" said Handy, with a sneer. "I should think it was plain enough. It's a call to pay fifteen percent. to make good stock; that's what it is. If it isn't, read it out."

The bald-headed gentleman turned a deep crimson in his excitement.

"And do you mean to tell me that these works are not making money?" he panted, breathlessly.

Vulpin interfered here:

"Now, my dear Mr. Blodgett, my dear sir, be calm. This is only temporary. The strike made us lose money; and we must not expect profits all the time. I'm quite satisfied to pay up on my stock, and trust to the future to make up my loss."

Blodgett and the rest began to talk all together, full of anger, but evidently not knowing what to do, and John saw that the two clever rascals in office, having the power in their hands, were more than a match for the disunited and ignorant shareholders.

A call had been made by the secretary to pay up fifteen per cent on all shares of stock to supply deficiencies, at a time when the company was really making money, and the result must be of course to throw the shares down in the market to nothing.

And he saw no way to prevent this, till one of the shareholders cried out:

"We want a meeting at once. There's more than a quorum here. Mr. President, I make the demand for a special meeting under the by-laws."

"You can't have it," growled Handy. "It lies in my discretion. The regular meeting is to be held Monday. You'll get all you want in the way of information then. But you can't vote on your shares till you make up your arrears, all of you."

Mr. Blodgett shook his fist at Handy.

"Since when, sir, since when? The call was never voted on by us."

"But it was by the board of directors," was the sarcastic reply. "You may as well make up your mind that you'll have to pay up, or lose your stock. If you don't like to, I'll take all that you have myself and pay you twenty for it at once. That's fair."

Blodgett and the rest seemed to be quite taken aback by this offer of money for something they just thought worthless, and one man in the rear of the crowd called out:

"Say twenty-five, and I'll sell you a hundred at once."

Handy shook his head scornfully.

"You must be sick, man. The stock was down to thirteen in May, and we've lost money since that. I'm only taking it at all on speculation."

Old Blodgett pricked up his ears.

"Speculation, eh? And you offer twenty for it, with fifteen to pay on it. That's strange. Reckon I'll hold on till the next meeting. Good-day."

And he went out, talking to himself all the way, while the others melted away one by one, to the apparent relief of Vulpin.

And all this time John Armstrong had been watching them to see if any of them had yet received his note sent out the previous night or posted in the morning.

None seemed to have heard yet of anything strange beyond the stock call.

As soon as the last one was gone, Handy observed sarcastically to John:

"You see what a man would get by sticking to that impracticable crowd of fellows. They couldn't help you if they wanted. Now then, you go to Europe, have a good time, and when you're back you'll find everything lovely."

John compressed his lips.

"For you and Vulpin, yes."

"And for you, too."

"But how about the rest?"

"Oh, let 'em sweat," was the coarse reply. "It will do them good. Now then, John, be off. I don't want any of them to see you. I was afraid some of them might have been asking you questions when they were here just now."

Vulpin chuckled.

"He! he! that would have been rather funny, eh, Handy? Well, now, I suppose it's all settled. Mr. Armstrong, we'll trouble you for the key of the safe, by the by."

John looked at him. It was the third time it had been asked for, and he knew Vulpin well. For the first time he began to scent treachery to himself, as well as the directors and others.

"I suppose," he said, quietly, "you'll give me time to close up the accounts, and make my final statement."

"No need of it, my dear sir," returned the smiling Vulpin. "We have every sort of confidence in you. I don't believe that we shall need any. We'll take the books just as they are."

"Ay, ay," added Handy, impatiently. "The sooner you're off the better. Vulpin and I have got to go over this business quietly, so you go out, give the clerks a holiday and then come back and we'll give you your final orders. You may as well lock up the books and give us the key of the safe."

John nodded and went out. He began to see a way of extrication from all his troubles, and one which would throw the burden of moving on his foes.

He went out; saw the books put away in the safe, sent off the clerks, who looked more astonished than ever and a little frightened at two holidays in succession; and then locked the safe himself put the key in his pocket and looked into the inner office.

Then he said, quietly:

"Gentlemen, I may as well give you the notice now as any time. I intend to fight for the shareholders, and have notified them all of the state of affairs. You are smart men, both; but not quite smart enough to evade the law. I am manager of these works by a vote of the board, and you have no business in them save at board meetings, or to ask for information. I give you your choice of two things. Let your schemes go, or I tell the whole matter when the board meets."

Both Handy and Vulpin had started up; and, for the first time, the face of the president wore a look of fear.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that, in a case of this sort, it is diamond cut diamond. I have altered the combination of the safe lock, and I refuse to give up the key till the full board meets. If you choose to take the responsibility of stopping the

works, apply for an injunction. Meantime, if you are not out of this room in one minute I shall call in the men to eject you. You know best if they love you since the strike."

Vulpin had crouched down by his desk, ashy pale, and now he faltered out to Handy:

"Don't get excited, please don't. He'll listen to reason. Look here, Armstrong, you've got us fairly at last. Let us down easy. Come in with us and we'll give you half the profits. I tell you, there's half a million in it for you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HONESTY THE BEST POLICY.

JOHN advanced to Vulpin and laid his hand on his shoulder, saying:

"If I'd had any doubt before that you were a rascal in a scrape, I should lose it now. You'll go at once, and understand that you cannot enter this office again till the board meets. If you are here then, you can explain to the directors. Go!"

With that he gripped the secretary so sternly that Vulpin, who was physically cowardly though morally audacious, went out unresistingly, and John saw him stand on the sidewalk alone, as if doubtful what to do.

For himself he went back to Handy, whom he found looking completely broken down, haggard and desperate.

The president glared at him as he came near and John saw he had a pistol in his hand.

"Don't try to put me out," he snarled. "Vulpin and Abel Handy are two very different men. You ungrateful dog, after all I've done for you! Back."

John heard the click, click, of the pistol-lock, but he did not halt.

"Fire if you dare," he said. "You don't know me yet, Handy."

As he spoke came a flash and report while John felt a sharp twinge in one side from the graze of a bullet.

The next minute he was on Handy, had grasped him like a vise, tearing the pistol from the other's hand, and was shaking him fiercely with the vast superiority of his strength; for John was angry at last, and the slight wound inflicted on him by the pistol shot had enraged him furiously.

Abel Handy, choking and gurgling, but struggling all the time, was pinned up against the wall till he was black in the face and nearly senseless, when John ran him out into the street, and sent him into the arms of Vulpin, just in time to save him from falling on the pavement.

Then he went back to his desk to meet the stare of several workmen, whose machines ran near the glass door, at which they were flattening their noses to see what was the matter in the office.

He went to the door and looked into the shop.

"You men, keep at your work, and I will attend to mine."

They went to their machines at once, but he knew that the story must spread, so he set to work himself at once to make his position secure against any curious intruder, by drawing the curtains in front of the doors, and turning the keys.

Then he unlocked the safes, took out the books, and began to make out a statement as far as the work had gone, satisfying himself that there was no possibility of his making a mistake in his estimate of profits.

He had the advantage in his favor that in his office of manager he was also cashier, though the checks of the president, countersigned by the secretary, were necessary to draw out the funds of the concern.

Hitherto no trouble had been experienced and the check-book showed a heavy balance in favor of the company as being in the bank, when it suddenly occurred to him that Handy and Vulpin, in their evident desperation, might try to get at this very money.

No sooner did this occur to him than he also saw its possibility, unless he took means to stop it forthwith.

He locked the safe, left the office, hurried to the bank, and got there just in time to see Handy and Vulpin coming out with smiles on their faces, as they passed him, that showed him they thought they had outwitted him at last.

In that moment John felt the sweat roll down his body in fear of what had happened.

Then he cast a lightning glance over both, made up his mind instantly, and seized Handy before he could go another step.

The bank detective was near by, and to him John called:

"Quick, quick! Crooked work. Take them into the cashier's office, I tell you."

The quick-witted officer saw something was wrong, hurried up, and the two were hurried by him and John into the cashier's office.

Neither made any resistance, and the little stir attracted no attention outside, though the bank cashier looked astounded as the four men came in.

"What's the matter, gentlemen?" he asked.

John stepped forward.

"I desire to give you formal notice, sir, to pay no more checks for the Vulcan Company

till after our next board meets, when a new president and secretary are to be elected. Mr. Handy wishes to make a deposit for us of the proceeds of a check he has just drawn."

Then to Handy he whispered:

"Quick, or I'll have you in jail in just ten minutes."

Handy was as pale as ashes now. He knew that what he had just done was a clear case of embezzlement, and he tried to put a good face on the matter by yielding at once.

He and Vulpin had in fact drawn a check for more than the amount in the bank, which had been paid without a question on their signatures, with a reminder that it must be made good at once; to which Handy had replied that they were going to make a heavy deposit that afternoon, which would make it all right.

And now, with faces as calm as they could make them, they went with John to the receiving teller's window, where they redeposited the very money they had just drawn, and before John had left the bank he had made the cashier clearly understand that there was some trouble in the Vulcan Company from which lawsuits were likely to spring, and that it would not be safe to pay out money till the trouble was settled.

Then he went back to the works, and noticed that he was followed all the way by Vulpin, who looked thoroughly cowed at last.

He resumed his labor at the statement and had nearly completed it, when there came a timid, apologetic knock on the door.

He went there and saw Vulpin outside, all alone.

"Don't be hasty, Armstrong," he said, as the young man was about to close the door. "I have another proposition to make to you, independent of Handy. Let me in, and I'll tell you. He has gone home in despair. We are both ruined. Let me come in."

"Come in," said John, sternly; "but mark my words. If your proposition contains dishonor, I'll not put you out gently, as I did before. Now come."

Vulpin came in quietly and sat down on a chair before he spoke.

Then he said:

"Armstrong, you're a cool hand, and you have got us. I'll tell you the whole truth. Handy and I have sold the stock short, thinking it must go down. Instead of that, it is bound to go up. We shall not be able to deliver, and must both go by the board. If you will take our stock off our hands, we'll sell it to you at ten, if you can get the cash to-night. We have got to have cash, somehow, to get out of this place."

"I've no money to spare to buy your stock," was the quiet answer. "If you choose to call a meeting for to-morrow, make a clean breast and resign, I'll do my best to help you; but if not, you must fight it out as you can. By to-morrow morning they'll all be here, I think. Play them a square game, and I'm with you. You may break as stock gamblers, but as officers of this company you'll be all the better off."

"But what can you do for us?" asked Vulpin, eagerly.

"I can make the stockholders as happy as men ought to be who are in a prosperous concern instead of a ruin," was the firm answer. "You must make up your mind to forfeit that half-million you could only make by swindling every other stockholder. Break your contracts in Wall street, and keep those with your partners, and I'm with you."

Vulpin looked at him with a furtive snarl as he said:

"Oh, you're a deep one. You know how to make your stake out of this. See here, we've got to give in. I'll resign my post, and Handy will do the same, if you'll keep us from exposure. It has to be done somehow."

"Will you deal honestly then?" asked John, with a searching look.

"Certainly, man; we're in your power, and both know it. I'll call the meeting for to-morrow noon."

Then he went away, and John finished his work late, and went home tired out and far from easy yet in his mind.

Next day, as he had foreseen, the works were invaded by a regiment of small holders of shares, anxious for a meeting; and, to his great relief, Handy and Vulpin made their appearance and consented at once, a meeting being called immediately of all the shareholders.

It was a moment of intense anxiety to John when he rose, till he had got well into his statement, when he began to hear approving coughs, and gradually these spread till he closed, when Blodgett of the bald head moved:

"That the thanks of the company be extended to the manager, and that his salary be raised twenty-five per cent. for his services."

The motion was carried, when both Handy and Vulpin rose and put in their resignations and the chair was taken by Blodgett.

Then John saw on the other side of the long table James Stryker, staring at him with a peculiar malignity of expression.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF RIGHT.

JAMES STRYKER a stockholder in the Vulcan!

The thing seemed impossible, yet it was undeniably true; for James it was.

Mr. Blodgett rapped the table.

"First business in order is election of new officers. Nominations for president are in order, gentlemen."

"I nominate Mr. James Stryker," said the late president, Handy.

"I second it," said Vulpin.

There was a short silence, till some said:

"Stryker! Who is he? He is no stockholder."

"Pardon me," answered Vulpin, blandly.

"He is, since yesterday afternoon. He came in and bought the necessary amount to entitle him to act on the board. I move his appointment."

Up jumped another member.

"We don't know the young man, except that he's sold out of the Excelsior and proved a business failure. I move that Mr. John Armstrong be made president and manager in one. He has shown his capacity for our interests, and we cannot make any better choice. Yesterday there was a call on the stock; to-day there's a clear five per cent. dividend in one quarter. I vote for Armstrong."

"Armstrong's not a stockholder," said Handy shortly, and faces fell.

Armstrong himself rose.

"Pardon me. Here are certificates for two hundred shares of stock in my name. I bought them, ten at a time, with my savings, and I assure you I shall never sell them for less than I gave for them."

This turned the tide in John's favor, and an animated dispute followed, which ended in loud cries for a vote by stock, and the clerk was directed to call the roll.

At the end of ten minutes, it appeared that Stryker, Handy and Vulpin controlled a little over one-third of the stock, while all the rest was voted on, directly or by proxy, and all the votes were cast for John Armstrong, who found himself at last head of the Vulcan Company.

A determined effort was then made to thrust in Stryker as secretary, but this also proved unsuccessful, and the bald and irritable Blodgett was chosen for that high office, when the meeting broke up in great glee, the Handy party being completely beaten.

As they broke up, Armstrong saw Handy shake his fist at him as he went off with Stryker and Vulpin; but he took no notice of it, for he could feel for his former employer in his bitterness of isolation and defeat.

For himself, he felt at last secure from his foes, in a position from which none could dislodge him; and as one after another of the small shareholders came in to him and made him trustee and proxy, the time arrived when he had a clear majority of shares or proxies in his own hands, and ran the works to suit his own interest—that is, to make money.

He heard nothing of Handy, Vulpin, or Stryker in all this time, save as he saw occasional notes in the papers of their "operations on the street."

But they could not do much with the shares of the Vulcan Company, which soon ceased to be quoted at all, having been all retired and held for investment by men who did not care to gamble with them. Whenever any appeared John was always ready to buy them, and by the end of his third year as president, his two hundred had risen to three hundred and fifty shares, worth nearly three hundred and fifty per cent. on their face value, on account of the heavy dividends they had earned during the year.

Then John began to find himself quite a well-known man about town; to see his name in the papers in connection with large railway operations, and to receive offers to leave his position and accept the presidency of other companies, with salaries treble his own.

To all these offers he returned a steady negative, preferring to stick to his own legitimate line of business; and so matters went on for another year, when, as he was going home one evening, he saw on the walls a great staring poster, with the name STRYKER on it, in letters about ten feet high, the whole of a long board fence being covered with notices.

He found then, to his surprise, that his old rival had gone into politics, and was announced to make a grand oration that very night at the Academy of Music, on the subject, "The Iniquities of Monopoly." The oration was said to be under the auspices of the "Society of Knights of the Hammer," and admission was to be free to ladies and gentlemen.

John took it into his head that he would go there that night. His father had lately come to live with him and his wife at the little house in Ashley street, and they were beginning to find the quarters there somewhat cramped since the arrival of another Armstrong, of whom the old man had said:

"I'm John Armstrong, Senior, you're John Armstrong, Junior, and if this here baby is to be called John, too, how'n thunder air ye goin' to tell which of us ye means, when ye say John?"

But Ella had settled the difficulty.

"There need be no trouble about it. You are to be grandpa now, John is of course papa, and baby is to be Johnny. I couldn't call him anything less dear, you know, grandpa."

So it was settled; and Johnny had been

christened about three years before the day when John, Junior, came home and told his family he was going to hear Stryker make a speech.

Perhaps it was not without a spice of malice that John said to Mrs. Morton:

"You know, madam, you always admired Mr. Stryker's abilities as an orator, and wished me to run in opposition to him."

It's pretty hard for the best of men to resist a fair chance to cut quietly at his mother-in-law.

Mrs. Morton colored slightly, retorting:

Perhaps you're not capable of the effort, after all. It's one thing to make money, so I've heard, and quite another to manage men."

"I'm sure John could do anything that Stryker could do," interposed Ella, warmly. "I never could see what you found in that man, mother, to admire. To me he was always odious."

"I don't admire him, dear, but I think that he has good qualities, after all, and he could buy and sell us five times over, after all his losses."

"Then it's his money you admire, not him," retorted Ella. "I don't admire either, for my part, mother, and I'm sure I shall not go to hear him."

John had not meant to stir up such a squabble by his remark, but he hastened to pour oil on the waters by saying:

"Don't let's be too severe on the poor fellow. I've been thrown across his path by accident so many times, to his cost, that I feel I ought not to sneer at him. I am going to-night, and I hope that you will accompany me, madam," turning to Mrs. Morton.

"With pleasure," returned the old lady. "I must say, John, that your wife is hardly considerate when she sneers at that poor fellow, who was ready to kiss the very ground she walked on."

John laughed.

"You can't expect me to sympathize with you on that score, madam. Good taste forbids me to disagree with my wife's estimate of our relative merits. But father will come, too."

And it turned out, when the evening came, that Ella suddenly changed her mind and determined to go and hear Stryker, so that the party became a "square one," in French phrase; the two old people in front, the young ones behind, till they secured seats in the midst of a huge crowd, and lost each other in the confusion.

And then John and Ella saw that the stage of the Academy was occupied by a band and a quantity of chairs, on which sat a goodly number of men of seedy aspect, old and young, with a sprinkling of other men in the glossiest of black broadcloth, with very large diamond shirt pins, very black mustaches and big jowls, in whom he recognized a type he had never seen before, John, strange to say, never having gone to a primary in his life.

Ella noticed them too and whispered:

"Who are those vulgar-looking men in black, John? They all look alike."

John shook his head.

"Indeed I don't know, dear. They look like undertakers one way, gamblers another."

Here John heard a chuckle behind him, and heard also a whisper:

"My! ain't they green?"

He thought he must be so, himself.

Yet there were quite a number of ladies in the house, for the posters had especially invited them to come, and the whole of the parquet seemed to be reserved for them. John thought to himself:

"Why are we so green, because we don't recognize the type of those men at once, I'll ask?"

He turned round to a young man on the seat behind, who was still grinning:

"My friend, can you tell me who are those men in black, with the little red badges in their buttonholes?"

The young man tried to hide his smile.

"Them's politishuns," he said; "they runs primaries and sich. Some calls 'em the heelers, some the strikers, but you'll see 'em allers, somewhere or other, when there's any meetin's goin' on. Them's in the boss's gang."

"The boss's gang. What boss?"

The young man favored him with a stare.

"Why, where was you born? Boss MacCarty of course, when Boss O'Hanlon don't get the upper hand. Whisht! Look at the speaker. Hiyl! hiyl!"

And the young man pounded vigorously on the floor with his stick as Mr. James Stryker, in full evening dress, came out on the platform to speak, following up the baldheaded and rotund figure of no less a man than Wagstaff.

CHAPTER XXIX.

POLITICS.

MR. JAMES STRYKER was, as John knew already, an orator of no mean order, with a good education, a fine flow of well-chosen language, and a gift of persuasive sophistry that enabled him to dilate on the manifold aspects of a subject of which his auditors knew very little.

He was speaking at a time when commercial distress was causing a great deal of discontent

among the classes of men who work for their living and think little of cause and effect.

Therefore, when James told them how they were oppressed by "grinding and soulless corporations who lived on the sweat of other men's toil," he was cheered to the echo; and when he went on to abuse all rich people they cheered louder, forgetting that the man who was addressing them was an idler himself who inherited all his money from his hard-working uncle.

To John, who knew all his past, there was something absurd in the whole speech, and he could not help thinking to himself how easily he could have answered all these sophistries, had he only the chance to do it.

When the meeting broke up, which it did after the usual formal vote of thanks to the speaker, he went home with his wife, and she could not help noticing how thoughtful he was.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked him, at last.

"I was thinking, Ella, that Stryker is not as good a speaker as I thought he was three years ago."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I think I could refute all he said myself, if I saw a chance."

"Then why don't you make one?"

"Make a chance?"

"Yes."

"How can I do it, Ella?"

"I don't know. It seems to me you can do anything you want to, John."

"Little flatterer."

"No. I'm in earnest. But tell me, John, what is it he said you could refute? I must say that, although I don't like him, he seemed to say some things that were unanswerable."

"What were they?"

"All about the rich oppressing the poor. How you used to toil in the old times, John! No one cared for you in those times but me. You remember that terrible strike, and the suffering it caused?"

"I do; but that was not brought on by the rich. It was the poor, who wanted more money for their labor. They got it that time, because prices were going up, but they have come down since that time again. No trade can pay more in wages than it earns in profits. The mistake Stryker and the rest make is in thinking they can alter the laws of trade by other laws made by man. It's no use."

"I don't understand, John."

"No, I don't suppose you do. I should have to make a long speech to show the real cause of the present trouble: and what's the use of it, after all?"

"Why don't you make the speech, John; and make it to the people?"

"Because—well, because I've other business to attend to. And here we are at home."

So the subject was dropped; but for all that it kept returning to John and haunting him at his business, when he heard, as he did every day, of the success with which the new political movement was meeting.

He, with his clear common sense and experience, saw the hollowness of the cause and the blunders on which it was founded, and felt an impulse to expose it, but was prevented by the press of business, till one day, much to his surprise, he was called on by a party of gentlemen well known in the trade, who came for no less a purpose than to ask him to run for Mayor of the city on a ticket composed of the respectable men of all parties who wished for honest government.

John was thunderstruck.

"Me! Why, what have I done that you should select me for your candidate?" he asked, in amazement.

One old gentleman replied:

"We want a candidate who has been a workman himself, to run against this new ticket the Knights of the Hammer are getting up. They have determined to nominate a young man called Stryker, who has plenty of money, and is going to spend it like water."

"But I've no money to spend like water," urged John, aghast at the idea.

"No; but you have personal worth, a stainless name and popularity."

"But why don't you nominate Mr. Blank, or So and So?" asked John, naming some prominent men in the city.

"Because they are not strong enough with the workmen. You see this young man's uncle was a workman himself, and that goes a great way with the people. We want a man who is not only the nephew of his uncle, but a man in himself. Will you run?"

"You can't elect me?" said John. "I tell you frankly I've no money to spend on politics. I'm not used to them, and all I've seen of political men makes me think them a bad set. I don't want to run at all."

"My dear sir," returned the spokesman of the delegation, "it shall not cost you anything, save for printing the tickets. All we want you to do is to say you will run, write a letter accepting the nomination when it is tendered you, and make one or two speeches."

"Say you will accept," urged another.

And John found himself so pressed on all sides that at last he asked for time to think over it, and they went away, promising to return next day.

The news had come to John like a shock, though not altogether unpleasant.

He thought of the day, only a few short years before when he had entered that city a tramp, looking for work, and as he contrasted his humble lot then with the honor apparently to be thrust on him, he felt deeply his own shortcomings.

"I dare not take it," he thought. "What shall I do? Who will advise me?"

He thought of the homely sense of his old father which had stood him so well in many a crisis of life, and at last determined to go home and talk the matter over.

That night there was a family council at 143 Ashley street, and it seemed to John as if the narrow little street had never looked so small as it did on the night he came home to tell his family that a large and influential body of men had chosen him, as far as they could influence his election, for the first office in the city in which he had so long been a resident.

He told them all the story in the dusk of the evening, after little Johnny had been put to bed, and when they were all sitting by the fire.

Then he asked:

"What do you think, father? Ought I to accept or not?"

The old man shook his head.

"Don't ask me, John. Let your wife speak first. I've got to think of it."

John turned to Ella.

"What do you say, dearest?"

"Let mother speak first," she said. "She knows more than I do."

"Well, mother, then, what do you think of it?" he asked.

Mrs. Morton knitted away for some moments before she answered:

"It's a grand opening, John, for the child. He'll be able to say his father had been chosen mayor for his merits."

"Then you advise me to accept?"

"Of course I do."

Here the elder Armstrong gave a slight chuckle and observed:

"Mebbe you don't understand, Miss Morton. This here ain't 'lection; it's only a nomination."

"What's that?"

"Only a nomination. These fellers may want John to pull their chestnuts out of the fire for 'em."

The old lady looked puzzled.

"I don't understand. Don't they want to make John mayor?"

"They want him to run for the office. That's a different thing, marm. John might get beat, and it would cost him a heap of money."

The old lady's face fell.

"Oh, that's different. Don't run, John. You can't afford it."

"Well, Ella, what do you say?" he asked.

"I say I believe you could do it," she answered. "Besides, after what you told me, the other night, I think it's your duty to the men."

"What men, Ella?"

"Your fellow-workmen. You told me that you knew Stryker was wrong, and could prove it, if you had a chance. Here is the chance come to you. You cannot afford to throw it away. I want to see you President of the United States before I die. There's no reason why you should not be so. Mr. Lincoln was a farmer's boy. Johnson was a tailor. You belong to the people. You have climbed up the ladder half-way. I want you to go to the very top. What do you say, father?"

She turned to old Armstrong, and the old man nodded his head.

"John," he said, slowly, "ons't on a time we used to have what they called high-toned gentlemen for Presidents, men who owned land and didn't work for a livin'. In these days it's different. Any man as has grit and brains kin rise to the top in America. Since they ax ye, I think ye've got to run."

"Very well, father," said John. "I'll do it. Mechanics have been mayors before this. I'll run."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PLOT.

SIX weeks after the name of "John Armstrong, Mechanic," had appeared on the walls of the city as the Reform candidate for mayor, Mr. James Stryker, Mr. Abel Handy, and Mr. Rufus Vulpin sat together in a handsomely furnished room in Fifth avenue, talking in low tones, with gloomy countenances.

At least Stryker and Handy seemed to be in a bad humor, though Mr. Vulpin wore his usual sly smile, as he sat apart from the others, sipping a glass of lemonade, for he never drank anything strong—not from any scruples as to the morality of the practice, but because he needed a clear head all the time.

Stryker and Handy, on the other hand had both been drinking freely, and the libations only seemed to increase their gloom.

"Confound the luck!" said Stryker, in a

vicious way. "The fellow crosses me all the time, and always in a place where he gets the best of me. Who'd have thought that he, of all others, would have come out in politics. Why, he never attended so much as a primary in his life."

Handy uttered a curse.

"He's got the devil's own luck. He ought to have failed, years ago; but somehow he always pulls through. When I think of the day he first came into those works, and how I befriended him, and then think how he turned me out at last, I feel as if I could waylay and shoot him for revenge."

Vulpin smiled.

"Don't get excited, Handy. We've not made so badly off it, after all."

Handy scowled.

"You haven't, you mean. Confound your cold blood. You'll die a millionaire yet. But I can't be satisfied with money alone. I want revenge."

"It doesn't pay," said Vulpin, quietly. "Money does, my boy. There's money in this, if you only take the right way."

"What way?" asked Handy, sullenly.

"Go to work in the proper way to defeat Armstrong instead of growling."

Stryker laughed bitterly.

"Easy talking. How are we to do it? That confounded name 'Mechanic' is going to swamp us all. Stryker will be beaten. He hasn't a show."

"I know it. They'll outvote us."

"Then what's to be done? You may be sure I'd grasp at anything to defeat him."

"Simple enough. Let Stryker withdraw in favor of the third man, O'Reilly. Then you have a chance to beat Armstrong, and O'Reilly will give you anything."

"It won't do," said Stryker, sullenly. "I should be beaten anyway. Get O'Reilly to resign in my favor and we can talk."

"That can be done, too; but you'd be beaten all the same, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you can count him out."

Stryker looked at him approvingly.

"You've a good head, Rufus. That can be done, too. But how?"

"What will you give me if I show you how to do it?"

"Anything in my gift, if I'm elected."

"Very well. Listen. To count him out, you'll have to take off his attention in some way on the day before election. I know where he gets his tickets printed, and we've got to seize them all on the way."

"But what then?"

Vulpin smiled sarcastically.

"You've no head at all. If his workers have no tickets, how are the voters going to elect him? Not one in ten will take the trouble to write his name. If one in five omits it, we shall carry the city. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see; but how is it to be done?"

"I'll tell you again. His attention must be attracted on the day before."

"And how are we to do that?"

"Well, hasn't he a family?"

"Yes."

"Attack him through his family, on that very night."

Handy, drunk as he was, shook his head.

"No, no, that wouldn't do. Confound it, I hate him bad enough. I'd like to get even with him; but not that way. I've seen his wife, and she's a lady. Then he's got a boy, four years old, a regular little beauty. Can't hurt him. No, no, Vulpin, have to find some other way."

Stryker scowled at him.

"Strikes me you're getting pretty moral nowadays, for a stock operator. That wife of his indeed! I owe her a grudge too, and as for the kid—Go on, Vulpin. What were you going to say?"

"Simply that if we could decoy her and the young one away from home on the afternoon before election, we'd make him so anxious about them that he'd forget all the rest. No need to harm them a bit; but twelve hours' absence at the right time would be worth thousands of votes for us."

Stryker set down an empty glass with such force as to shiver it.

"By heavens, it can be done," he cried; "and I know the very man to do it for us. We're not the only ones who have grudges to settle with Armstrong."

What more transpired in the way of settling details will appear in the sequel of this story. Suffice it to say that the three cronies went out from the club-house where they had been holding their consultation, and separated; Stryker and Vulpin together, Handy going off alone.

It was within three days of election, and the name of "John Armstrong, Mechanic," had "taken" like wildfire, as its original starters had foreseen. There is something in the fact of a man having risen from humble origin in life that always appeals to the sympathies of the American people, and when, to energy and industry, is added a stainless record, the whole combination is pretty sure to prove victorious at the polls.

During the latter part of the campaign, John,

much against his will, had been compelled to abandon his post at the Vulcan Works to the bald-headed and irritable Blodgett, who had gone in, heart and soul, to help him, and was running matters as well as he knew how. John, surrounded by a mass of papers, dictating to three clerks at a time, his head full of facts and figures, writing letters to some, replying to others, and getting ready for the final effort of the campaign, was seated at a desk at his headquarters, when a messenger came in with a note in Blodgett's well-known characters.

"DEAR MR. ARMSTRONG:—

"There's trouble in the works. For heaven's sake come and help me, or there will be a strike."

"AUGUSTUS F. BLODGETT."

John stared at the note and called for the messenger-boy, but the lad was gone. He looked round at the mass of political business in the room, and said to himself:

"One of the two has got to suffer—private or political business. If I lose my hold on one, my family is ruined; if I let the other go it is only a bitter disappointment. I'll go to the works."

He called to the secretary of the campaign club hastily; gave him directions as well as he could what to do, and then snatched his hat, ran out, called a hack, and was soon whirled away to the Vulcan Works.

On the way there he passed by Ashley street, and some feeling he could hardly explain induced him to stop at the little house and ring the bell.

Kitty opened to him and looked amazed to see him at such an hour.

"Where's your mistress, Kitty?" he asked.

"Gone out, sir, with Master Johnny to show him the dolls in Fourteenth street. She said she'd be back to tea."

"And Mrs. Morton?"

"She's a-lying down, sir."

"And my father?"

"Gone out, sir."

John felt relieved from some vague fear that had crossed his mind at first, and drove on to the works.

As he came near, he saw the gates open, carts going in and out, everything appearing as usual.

Into the office he went, to find the bald-headed and irritable Blodgett sitting at his desk, so busy over columns of figures that he did not look up till John said to him, gravely:

"Mr. Blodgett, what does this mean?"

Then the bald-headed secretary started in his chair, as if some one had stuck a pin in him, dropped his pen and cried:

"God bless my soul, Mr. Armstrong, what in the world's the matter? You startled me out of my wits."

John took out his note, and said:

"Upon my word, Blodgett, one of us two must have made a serious error. I received this note not half an hour ago, by a messenger boy."

Blodgett stared at him.

"A note! From me! I never sent you any, though I'm glad to see you. Here's a problem about the number of square inches in this tubular boiler for the Manhattan—"

"Never mind the problem," said John, impatiently. "Didn't you send a note to me by a messenger boy?"

"No, no, I tell you, no."

"Then it's a forgery and there's a trick in some place or other," said John, in a thoughtful way. "I wonder who—"

Then it flashed on him at once.

"What a fool I've been," he said. "It is a political trick to make me lose time. It shall not succeed."

He rushed back to the carriage and drove like a fire-engine back to headquarters, where he worked twice as hard as he had been doing to make up for lost time, writing and dictating, till long after dark, and going home about ten o'clock, pretty well tired out.

"To-morrow's the last day," he said to himself; "and after that I'll have rest. But that trick to-day was a sharp one."

The door opened the instant he rung the bell, and his father appeared, saying:

"Where's Ella, John? Thought she was with you. She and the boy hain't come home sence this morning."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LOST CHILD.

FOR the first time in his life John Armstrong, the stout-hearted, staggered back and very nearly fell down on his own door-step.

A sick feeling came over him, and he groaned out:

"My God! father, you can't mean it?"

The old man caught him by the arm, and drew him in, whispering:

"Hush! Don't talk loud. They'll hear ye."

"Who'll hear?" asked John, vaguely, as he entered the parlor and sunk down on a chair, completely unnerved.

"Miss Morton and Kitty," whispered the old man. "I told 'em she were with you, or the old lady would ha' gone nigh crazy, I do b'lieve. Now, John, don't give in. It ain't no use bein' skeered at nothen, or even at sumthin'.

Skeer don't help no one. I've been axin' questions."

"And what did you find out?" asked his son, gloomily. "This blow is too hard to bear, father, at such a time."

Old Armstrong laid his hand on his son's shoulder.

"That's just what's the matter, John. Ef it had ha' happened any other time, I'd ha' been skeered myself, mebbe; but I know it's only a trick, and I guess I've got my claws on the man as d d it, or had it done. To-morrow's last day 'fore 'lection."

John started.

"My God! you don't mean that it is a political trick?" he exclaimed. "If I had any idea it was, I'd—"

"You'd do as I've done—find out, and be sure not to let 'em get the best of ye."

"Listen, boy. Ella took the child out to see the shops, gittin' ready fur Christmas. She went out in the artemoon, arter lunch, and, when it grew dark, old Miss Morton got uneasy. So I went out and began to hunt. Finally I went down to your head-quarters, where I met a boy in a messenger dress, as give me this here letter."

He handed John a letter which proved to be a very clever forgery of his own handwriting, and ran in these words:

"DEAR FATHER:—

"Ella and Johnny will dine with me. Ella is helping me in election writing, and will come home with me. Tell Mrs. Morton not to wait dinner. Yours, affectionately, JOHN ARMSTRONG."

"I never wrote that, father. What sort of a boy gave you this?"

"Short, stout boy, with red hair."

"The same that fooled me in the morning. What did you do?"

"Came home, of course. Thought it must be all right."

John rose up in his place.

"It is an election trick, father. But the question is, what shall we do? For the first time in my life I feel lost."

"Sit down, John. We've got to think. First of all, we've got to give the alarm to the police, and have it in the papers for the morning. You go to the papers, and I'll go hunt with the police. They are somewhere in this city but we can't tell where till the morning."

John stirred restlessly.

"But we must do something. I cannot rest in this state of mind. My wife and child gone, no one knows where! Come, I must be away at once. Let us both go to police head-quarters."

They went out of the house silently, and hurried away to police head-quarters, where they told their story and were greeted with many expressions of sorrow and sympathy from the chief, who saw in John his possible future superior, and desired to keep on good terms with him.

"Rely on it, Mr. Armstrong, we'll find them for you, wherever they are. Easy enough to trace, I'm sure. Lady and child. Dress, full description. All right. You shall be notified at once, as soon as we hear anything definite. Good-night."

Then they hurried down-town to the papers, and told their tale to the men on duty in the office, who jumped for joy at the idea of a sensation, and wrote up the most startling accounts of what had happened.

Then, when both were tired of telling it, they took a hack and rode home at full speed, to find Mrs. Morton pacing the hall in a dressing-gown and shawl, thoroughly frightened at the absence of so many people.

When the old lady saw them, she fell into a nervous fit, which frightened John; and while he and Kitty were trying to soothe her, came a thundering ring at the bell.

Old Armstrong ran to the door, and threw it open, to discover nothing at all. He looked up and down the street, heard the wheels of a carriage in the next block, going off, full speed; and then his eyes fell on a white note lying on the steps, which he picked up.

He carried it in to John, who left Mrs. Morton, to tear it open.

It contained these words:

"JOHN ARMSTRONG:—If you want your wife and child, take the train to Albany at midnight. They went on the Daniel Drew."

John seized his hat, after one look at the clock. He had just fifteen minutes to get to the Grand Central Depot, and a hack-stand was within three blocks. He was off like the wind, found a cab, gave the driver a dollar to hurry, and arrived at the depot—just five minutes after the midnight express had gone.

He rushed to the telegraph office. It was closed for the night.

Almost in despair, he bethought himself of a hotel where they kept open all night, and from thence telegraphed to the chief of police at Albany a full description of the missing people, telling him to search the Daniel Drew, which was the night boat, and had gone up at six o'clock.

Then, his mind a little easier, he went back home, and found his father waiting up for him, to whom he told what he had done.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Ye wouldn't give me time to speak when that thing came, John: but it's my notion that was only another trick. The fellers want you to go to Albany, to get ye out of the way." "But what could I do, father? Put yourself in my place. What would you do?" "I'd go to sleep, John," said the old man, firmly. "Ye won't be fit for nothen to-morrow if ye don't sleep, and ye've got to see to all that 'lection business—"

"Election business!" interrupted John, wildly. "Would I'd never seen or heard of it! I was happy till I did. What, think you, would I care for all the triumph I could gain, if they are lost to me? My little child, my poor little child! And I have been so busy I have not seen him for nearly three days! Oh, if ever I get him back—"

"Ye will, boy, ye will. Don't get down-hearted over it. The p'lice hain't had time to report yet."

"But who is with them? How were they decoyed to Albany?" asked John, gloomily.

"They ain't gone to Albany. That letter was only a stall. Look here, John, I told ye I'd got my claws on the man as did this. Guess I have. D'ye know the handwrite of this feller?"

John scanned the note eagerly.

"No, I don't," he said, sadly.

"Well, the same man wrote that as wrote the others. He's got a queer way 'bout him of makin' a 'J.' See it, in your name and Johnny's. It ain't like I makes it."

John took the notes and looked at them closely. There was a peculiarity about the letter his father mentioned, and he began to rack his brains for the place where he had seen such a "J" before.

He could not recall it till his father said:

"I never seen sich a 'J' but in one place afore this, John."

"And where was that, father?"

"On the back of them shares of stock you was a-showin' me the other day, John. I took notice on it because I'm ruther proud of my own 'J's.'"

"What shares, father?" asked John, beginning to tremble with excitement.

"Why, your own, of course. I hain't see'd no others, John. They was signed by that secretary you used to have, as was bounced for Blodgett; and July was the month of the date he put in."

John eyed his father wistfully.

"Don't say so, if you're not sure," he said, in a low tone. "That man was Rufus Vulpin. I don't believe he'd—"

"Ain't ye got a letter from him? That mou't tell the story," said the old man, keenly.

John went to his desk and rummaged his papers industriously, till he found an old notice of meeting, signed "Rufus Vulpin, June 23d, 18—"

He compared it closely with the others. The 'J's in "June," "July," "John" and "Johnny" were the same and characteristic in form.

John looked up at his father.

"It is Vulpin," he said, in a low, grating voice. "I believe I'll tear the hide off him in strips, the villain."

"Not till you've got at the wife and kid," was the shrewd answer. "I don't blame ye for bein' mad; but we've got to git them fust, boy. Where does he live?"

"At the Hotel Albermarle, I think," said John, thoughtfully. "But wherever he is, I'm going to have him, one way or another, before the sun sets on to-morrow's work. Will you come on now, father?"

"Sartin I will, boy. This is suthin' like biz; but mind ye keep your temper. It ain't sayin' we kin prove he kidnapped your wife and child, 'cause he and the man as writ them notes makes a 'J' alike."

"It is he," said John, firmly. "I know it. At first I thought it might be my old foe, Stryker, but he could not be such an expert counterfeiter. Now that I look back, I recall that Vulpin could sign any man's name he wanted."

They left word with Mrs. Morton, to comfort her, that they had a clew; and then started out in the night to hunt for Vulpin.

As they stepped into the street the clocks struck two in the morning, and old Armstrong observed:

"They're bound to be in bed by this time, if we have to keep going all night long."

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

In an upper room of the hotel to which John

and his father were now going, Mr. Rufus Vulpin and his latest crony, Mr. Stryker, were smoking a friendly cigar.

"And how did you do it, Rufe?" inquired Mr. Stryker, knocking off the ashes.

"Brains, my boy, brains, and a little skill in imitating handwriting. I fooled them all round, and that messenger boy's a jewel. He found the lady and boy, and gave them a letter from Armstrong to come to the head-quarters in a coach, you know. Well, it wasn't my fault, was it, that the coach took them elsewhere, while the father of the family was hunting up trouble at the Vulcan Works? They're safe enough, and I sent him off to Albany on a chase that will keep him all to-morrow. Meantime we'll send out the bogus tickets, and I have it all planned in Albany to keep him there till it's too late to do anything. His folks will be demoralized."

Stryker laughed.

"Serve him right. Did the fool think he could jump into politics at a bound? But what's become of Handy?"

Vulpin sneered.

"He's got scrupulous all of a sudden. I verily believe that he's getting soft in the head or heart; it matters little which."

"Then he'd better keep out of politics," the other retorted, sarcastically. "It's cutthroat business, the same as Wall street."

Here they were roused by a knock at the door, and one of the night waiters came in.

"Two men want to see you, Mr. Vulpin."

Vulpin started guiltily.

"Two men. What are they like?"

"Rough-looking men, sir. Say they want to see you on important business, and you'll be sorry if you don't see them."

Stryker looked at Vulpin.

"It's some heelers," he muttered. "They know you're treasurer of the committee. What shall we do?"

"Wish election was over," said Vulpin, with a sigh; "but we've got to be civil to them now."

Then he said to the waiter:

"Send them up."

Presently into the room walked two men in the dress of workmen, both bearded and very large in size.

Vulpin looked at them in surprise.

"What do you want? I don't know you."

"But we knows you," said one of the men, in a rough country accent. "We've be'n and took care of the boys fur ye, and we wants our pay fur 'lection day in advance, or we tells the hull story."

"What story?" asked Vulpin.

"'Bout the lady and the kid. Where are they? My mate says he heard they was took this arternoon, and the boys say they ain't goin' to stand it 'less they knows where they is, so's they won't be harmed. We ain't goin' to be held liable fur kidnappin', we ain't."

Vulpin turned pale.

"Hush! man, what are you talking about? I don't understand. Speak low. People will hear you."

"Let 'em hear," retorted the big man. "I warn't in the job, but I knows them as was, and I'm goin' to squeal to the cops, if you don't come down."

"For heaven's sake," cried Vulpin, "be quiet, and I'll pay you anything. Here, here's ten dollars apiece—"

The words were not fairly uttered when the big man tore off his false beard and grappled him by the throat, crying:

"Ah, villain, it is true, then! Where are my wife and child? Tell me, or I'll tear you limb from limb!"

In the same moment the other man stepped over to James Stryker, saying:

"Sit down, young man, if you don't want a hole blowed into you. Your game's up at last. I'm John Armstrong, and this is my son."

Vulpin was already nearly black in the face under the terrible grip of the enraged Armstrong, and could only make signs for mercy, while Stryker sat still, cowed by the pistol in the hand of the old soldier.

"Now," said Armstrong, in a low, deep voice, like the growl of a wild beast, as he released Vulpin's throat, but still held him firmly by the shoulders, "I give you ten seconds to tell me where they are. Refuse or hesitate, and God have mercy on your soul."

He knew his man well. They were alone in that upper room, in a silent house; and Vulpin was a physical coward.

In piteous accents the wretch whined:

"Don't murder me. They are not hurt. I have not even seen them. They are only at the

house of a friend, locked up till after election day. Stryker did it—not I."

John shook him fiercely.

"Coward! What do I care who did it? Where are they?"

"Number 293 East — street," faltered Vulpin. "I'll go with you and fetch them, if you like."

"You shall!" was the stern reply. "Come along."

He made Vulpin take up his hat and come with him, saying to his father:

"Let the other go. I'll deal with him in the morning."

Then father and son took Vulpin between them, and left Stryker alone in the room to meditate over his last, most galling defeat of all.

A few newspaper clippings taken from the journals of the day will tell the rest of this story with greater clearness and brevity than we could give it in any other way.

The first scrap is cut from the first edition of the *Evening Tattler* and is headed:

"THE ELECTION.

"Our reports up to noon indicate that a very heavy vote is being cast, with great quiet and order in every district in town. It is impossible to ascertain till the closing of the polls the exact state of the vote; but well-informed watchers at every polling-place concur in saying that the reform ticket is sweeping everything. The exposure in yesterday's papers of the dastardly trick by which Mr. Armstrong's wife and child were decoyed to a strange house and forcibly detained there has caused an intense revulsion of feeling, and the finding of the lady and child was nearly the signal for outbreaks of mob violence against Mr. Stryker, the regular machine candidate. Only a timely speech from Mr. Armstrong saved his rival from a severe beating if not death. The expectation is that the polls will close with Armstrong well ahead."

The second edition of the same paper contained details of disturbances in the neighborhood of the Albemarle Hotel, where crowds waited for Stryker and hooted him as he came down.

It added:

"Mr. Stryker left town for the State of Connecticut on the one o'clock train and confesses defeat."

At ten o'clock at night newsboys ran howling up-town breaking the rest of inhabitants in side streets by yelling at the top of their voices:

"EXTRY!!! Got the 'sult the 'lacshun!!!"

People came running out to buy them and saw at the head of the columns:

"FIFTY THOUSAND MAJORITY!!!"

Below long columns of figures from different election districts was this paragraph:

"We congratulate our readers on the triumph of justice, and honesty, in the election of Mr. John Armstrong to be mayor of this city. The elected candidate is, in the best sense, a man of the people, who has worked his way up from the bottom of the ladder by industry, economy and honesty. If he does as well for the city government as he has, in the past, for every institution over which he has had control, we shall end in showing to the world the spectacle of the best governed city in America, instead of, as has unfortunately been too long the case, the worst."

Reader, are you tired of the fortunes and misfortunes of John Armstrong, Mechanic? If so, our story is over. Would you like to hear more of him? If so, read it in the real life of—we are proud to say—many a man like him in America.

In these days, when it has become too much the fashion to belittle our own institutions, and ape the vices as well as the manners of countries where titles and wealth are for the few, poverty and hopeless suffering the lot of the many, it is well to recall the fact that we have many John Armstrongs in America; that the tendency of our free government is to produce them, and that this tendency grows stronger every year.

To those who may think that the career of our hero is overdrawn, his virtues too great, his success too complete, we would say:

John Armstrong is a real character, and his type is to be found in every State of this Union. Hardly a city in our land but has had at some time such a man for mayor, and of our millionaire families, every one was founded by such a character in industry and economy.

Look up, then, workman of the land, man with the muscle hardened by labor, brain trained in the struggle for life. In America everything is possible for a workingman.

From the bottom of the ladder to the top are many steps, but on each one is written the motto:

"EXCELSIOR!"

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